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Music of the psycho

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Sympathy with the devil? Music of the psycho post-*Psycho*.

STAN LINK

'When I looked at you I heard a mysterious music', sings Richard Strauss's obsessive Salome to a freshly severed head. Shortly before her death, the mortally disturbed heroine of Strauss's *Elektra* (1909) asks 'Can I not hear it? Not hear the music? It comes from myself.' Lost in the shadowed folds of their own dysfunctional minds, Salome and Elektra have interior soundtracks that become an opportunity for musical speculation: what do we imagine we should hear when music is brought into explicit connection with deeply unhinged personalities and actions; what assumptions must we make in this speculation; why does a musical realization of psychopathology become convincing; how might music cope with the 'reality' of a situation when that concept may be eroded by a character's perspective or condition?

In answering these questions for its own severely disturbed figures, cinema has musically sustained the late romantic and early modernist styles. With aesthetic foundations tied to Freudian psychoanalytic ideas, and development roughly concurrent with that of early cinema, musical expressionism was perhaps destined to constitute the traditional sound of the filmic psychopath. But while that musical style now continues in film well beyond the currency of expressionism itself, a second practice in characterizing pathologically disturbed figures has also emerged. Elementally reimagining the musical reinforcement of horrific actions and emotions, some films have turned to unexpectedly trivial, light or even beautiful classical and popular music as an accompaniment to their moments of most intense threat and violence. This essay examines our potential interpretation of music in this

alternative approach, along with its deep-seated reconfiguration of the affective landscape and spectatorial engagement.

Horror and musical intimacy

As with Alfred Hitchcock's famously fractured editing, Bernard Herrmann's iconic score for the shower murder scene in *Psycho* (1960) examines its horror from many angles. The relentless, mechanical regularity of the rhythm performs the stabbing, standing in for the psychotically purposeful aggression. We feel the keenness of the knife's edge and the mutilating intent in the fast bowing and thin timbre of the strings. The intense harmonic dissonances played in the piercing high tessitura of the violin scream the victim's panic in unison with the spectator's dismay at watching. Weapon, victim, killer, witness, anguish – Herrmann's score knots together the entirety of the scene in a single musical chord.

Herrmann's cue is wonderfully efficient in evoking terror. But while it will serve here as a familiar example, it merely crystallizes the emotional and descriptive approaches of traditional musical horror. Such film music might be considered 'sincere' in that the musical distortion and grotesqueries of romanticism, along with the fragmentation and abstraction of expressionism, become congruent with horrific actions, emotional extremes and deranged interiorities. This musical tradition continues today in traditional horror genre films such as M. Night Shayamalan's *Sixth Sense* (1999) with its score by James Newton Howard, and carries over into slasher and thriller films such as Mark Romanek's *One Hour Photo* (2002) with music by Reinhold Heil and Johnny Klimek. Despite their narrative differences, films in this tradition make use of essentially the same affective strategy in that they can be said to 'suture' the viewer to an event whose terror lies not only in action and images but in the audibility of emotion. Such scores let us know the victim by forcing us affectively to *become* the victim. At the same time, we recognize the emotions of the killers on these soundtracks as we access their disfigured interiorities through musical style: shrieks and hatchets, chopping and rage, gasps and heartbeats, all become sensible; we are in direct contact.

Jeff Smith's summary of the filmic suture reflects such a reading of the traditional style of score:

> by creating an emotional bond among film, character, and spectator, the film score authorizes the spectator to 'claim' the emotion depicted on-screen as his own. In this way, the score serves to bind viewers to fictions; it not only represents the characters' emotions, but it also reproduces this emotional response in spectators.[1]

The interpretation of musical horror through suture creates an emotional continuity between the film and spectator. Such musical

1 Jeff Smith, 'Movie music as moving music', in Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith (eds), *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 149. It is beyond the scope of this essay to enter deeply into the debate about *how* music conveys emotion. Smith's work outlines this discourse with admirable clarity, however, and will be taken up later in this essay.

intertwining is even more evocatively described by music theorist John Rahn when, writing of concentrated musical listening, he reflects: 'during the time I am coupled with the music, there is little or no semeiosis going on. The music and I are too involved with one another for a space to open up between us at any time, so that I could constitute a separate it as a sign.'[2] For Rahn, this is an effect of any focused musical engagement. This coupling takes on a grim effectiveness in musical characterizations of the 'psycho-killer', however, when we further consider his idea that 'such connections are immediate and intimate, like touch'.[3] The musical strategy of traditional horror scoring can be understood as creating such immediate, intimate connections between the elements of a frightening scene: killer touches victim touches viewer.

Such intimacy, however, also touches the very limits of drama. The types of negative emotion associated with horrific danger can be particularly congruous: affects such as the victim's fear, the attacker's rage and the shock of the audience become interchangeable, resonating in the same music. A single musical cue such as Herrmann's shower scene plays a triple role in evoking the doomed woman's alarm, her killer's uncontrollable fury and the spectator's rocketing anxiety. As these various emotional perspectives wrap around each other – become *intimate* – boundaries of individual identity vanish. As characters, objects and spectators fuse, dramatic opposition tends to coalesce into a kind of unity: '*he*' becomes '*she*' becomes '*I*'. Momentarily at least, there is an amalgamation of emotional experiences.

2 John Rahn, 'Differences', in *Music Inside Out* (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 2001), p. 30.

3 Ibid., p. 31.

Anempathy and separation

But while radically concentrating and intensifying the affective experience, horrific intimacy trades the characterization of the *individuals* involved for the musical characterization of the *emotions* involved. The dramatic aim seems to be to reproduce the affect rather than the particular subjectivity that experiences or generates that affect. We hear 'Rage' with a capital 'R' or 'Fear' with a capital 'F'. That is, we experience fear as a *genre* of emotion, but we do not experience much by way of an individual's fear. In *Psycho*, Marion Crane's terror sounds musically much the same as, for example, that of the victims in *Friday the 13th* (Sean S. Cunningham, 1980), for which Harry Manfredini composed the music. And when we experience rage it does not musically evoke its origins in the Oedipal angst of Norman Bates. In spite of their many differences in character and motivation, for example, the adult Norman Bates in *Psycho* and the six-year-old Michael Myers in the opening of John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1979) are quite similar from both a music-affective and music-stylistic standpoint. And indeed, the pathology of intimately scored killers is traditionally just that of a 'psycho' with little sense of differentiation beyond the plainly maniacal.

Horror soundtracks thus typically confront us with aesthetic and affective positioning resembling the theorization of emotion in Descartes' 'Passions of the soul'. Becoming known as the 'doctrine of the affections', this work classifies all emotions according to six types, with the result that affect emerges as categorical and objective rather than individual and personal.[4] This view became a foundation for eighteenth-century musical aesthetics. For example, Caesar's aria, 'Tyrant Avoid My Sight', in Handel's *Julius Caesar* presents an anger that transcends both character and situation. As David B. Greene puts it, 'The musical embodiment of feelings lets listeners know these feelings without inferring them from the history of circumstances'.[5] The emotion of anger is categorical rather than personal, in part because the subject itself is viewed as largely generic. 'Apart from what each subject undergoes, every subject is essentially the same', writes Greene of this operatic standpoint.[6] This does not, of course, imply a conscious parallel with operatic emotion on the part of film composers, but such approaches also work well for interpreting the affective strategies of most horror. However fully a film character may be developed by other means, musically we hear emotions that transcend the particular 'history of circumstances'.

The history of music has also been one of changing approaches to affect, however. The aesthetic of emotion found in a Handelian *opera seria* eventually yielded to dramatic reforms by Gluck and Mozart resulting in more individuated characters. Transcending the portrayal of isolated, generic affects, the later approaches attempted to recreate a more complete sense of a character's entire personality. The psychological characterization of *opera buffa* characters, for example, became more detailed and complex as their musical representations began to evoke, say, a salient internal conflict. In her aria, 'Dove Sono', for example, the Countess in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* simultaneously longs for and is angered by the cheating husband she finally resolves to reform. Thus shifts in musical strategies both drive and are driven by the emergence of new types of characters (in both senses of that word) and newer views of the self. As Greene suggests, 'Handel replicates feelings that make up and define the self; Mozart replicates the self that has feelings'.[7] In that sense, the larger change in the emotional perspective was away from the categorical and towards the individual.

Again, without suggesting that film has somehow directly imitated opera's approaches to emotion, analogous shifts from the categorical towards the individual can nevertheless be heard in musical characterizations of film's psychopathological figures. Norman Bates represents the simultaneous emergence and maturity of a relatively new filmic character type: the quasi-sympathetic, intellectually or emotionally complicated psycho-killer. But as *dramatically* innovative as this taxidermist 'momma's boy' may have been, Bates does not represent a substantial strategic departure in terms of his musical

4 René Descartes, 'Passions of the soul', in Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin (eds), *Music in the Western World* (New York, NY: Schirmer, 1984), pp. 212–19.

5 David B. Greene, *Listening to Strauss Operas: the Audience's Multiple Standpoints* (New York, NY: Gordon and Breach, 1991), p. 17. Though ultimately centred on the work of Richard Strauss, Greene's supporting explication of the affective underpinnings in various operatic styles is extremely penetrating and useful.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., p. 19.

characterization. Music-stylistically, Herrmann's characterization of Norman is technically grounded in the expressionist idioms developed by composers like Strauss, Schoenberg, Bartok, Berg and Webern in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Indeed, Theodor Adorno and Hans Eisler single out modernism's potential for film horror:

> The traditional music written for such scenes has never been remotely adequate to them, whereas the shocks of modern music, by no means an accidental consequence of its technological rationalization – still unassimilated after thirty years – could meet their requirements. Schönberg's music for an imaginary film, *Begleitmusik zu einer Lichtspielszene, op. 34,* full of a sense of fear, of looming danger and catastrophe, is a landmark pointing the way for the full and accurate use of the new musical resources.[8]

8 Theodor Adorno and Hans Eisler, *Composing for the Films* (London: Athlone Press, 1994), pp. 36–7.

The chopping 'axe motive' in Strauss's *Elektra*, the dissonant 'blood motive' in Bartok's *Bluebeard's Castle* (1911) and the rhythmic-obsessive *idée fixe* in Berg's *Wozzeck* (1925) all exemplify musical techniques ripe for cinematic deployment. Herrmann's score for *Psycho*, among countless others, certainly realizes musical modernism's potential relevance to cinematic horror.

Nascent in the complexity of a figure like Bates, however, are perhaps a need and a desire for different kinds of musical treatment. If psycho-killers as a character type are to sustain narrative interest beyond the repulsive spectacle of their actions, that is, if they are to become full dramatic agents, then they might need to be invested with *personalities* rather than merely generic emotions, however fascinating the dysfunction of those emotions might be. The development of alternative musical strategies would seem to be implied, if not inevitable, in the emergence of a new filmic character type – approaches that might musically imbue the figure with some of the complexity, intellect and even sympathy that define this new cinematic character type.

For example, a single scene in Jonathan Demme's *Silence of the Lambs* (1991) makes audible two distinct musical characterizations of its psycho-killer, Dr Hannibal Lecter. One is the traditional strategy described above, but the other seemingly rejects sincerity and intimacy in favour of an altogether different approach. First, as the prison guards bring Lecter his evening meal, he evades their control and viciously assaults, kills and mutilates them. Composer Howard Shore's musical treatment of the carnage itself corresponds to what we might think of as the intimate or sincere approach that we hear in Herrmann's score for *Psycho*. The expressionistically intense dissonances, punishing volume and jarring timbre of the cue equate to the discomforting emotional intensity and derangement. Horrific, brutal music stands in for the victims' pain, Lecter's ecstatic rage and the spectator's helpless shock. As Michel Chion might describe it, Shore's music is 'empathetic' in that it can 'directly express its participation in the feeling of the scene,

by taking on the scene's rhythm, tone, and phrasing'.[9] Shore's music 'feels' what we feel in tandem with the victims and Lecter.

Within the same scene, however, we cannot ignore the prominent presence of a second piece of music and the different mode of characterization that it engenders. Apart from Shore's original cue, *Silence of the Lambs* also uses music that seems blithely indifferent, or even ironically contrary, to the gravity of the gory action. As the guards first enter his cell, Lecter is listening to a tape recording of some gentle keyboard music, the opening aria from Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. But the simple beauty of this music forms an unlikely prelude to Lecter's escape and imminent psychotic rampage. Providing no sense of danger, the Bach is emotionally detached from the ensuing carnage. As described above, Lecter actually subdues his captors to the accompaniment of Shore's non-diegetic soundtrack, but Shore's cue dies out well before the scene's horror is finished. As Lecter is about to mutilate one of his victims the *Goldberg Variations* again becomes audible, and the blood-spattered psycho stands dreamily keeping time by his tape recorder. The seventh variation, a joyful gigue, now goes merrily about its business as Lecter goes about his: cutting the face from one of his jailers.

Complementing the scene's musical 'empathy', then, is what Chion describes as 'anempathy' – a seemingly disparate affective relationship between soundtrack and image, narrative, action and character. As Chion writes, 'music can also exhibit conspicuous indifference to the situation, by progressing in a steady, undaunted, and ineluctable manner: the scene takes place against this very backdrop of "indifference"'.[10] This is clearly the case with the *Goldberg Variations*. Its 'conspicuous indifference to the situation' both before and after the bloodshed is surprising in light of our traditional expectation that music should somehow react to, or comment on, the scene it accompanies. Rather than the typical empathetic relationship between soundtrack and image, termed 'mutual implication' by Claudia Gorbman, musical anempathy offers what we might think of as a kind of mutual resistance.[11] Bach does not imply mutilation, and neither does mutilation call for Bach: music and image seem to subvert the demands of one another.

As an accompaniment to the spectacle of horrific violence, Shore's nondiegetic music provides the sort of categorical affect we might expect with such a scene. But the shifts from and to the musical anempathy of the diegetic Bach profoundly transform our engagement, beyond altering the affective tone itself. Relative to an intimate strategy, musical anempathy radicalizes subjectivity. In Shore's score, the dramatic elements and negative affects amalgamate as they do in traditional horror music, but the anempathetic accompaniment of the Bach here does not allow that. Musically, we do not know the victims; we are not in music-affective contact with them as we were with

9 Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 8.

10 Ibid.

11 Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 15.

Marion Crane during her murder. Furthermore, the *Goldberg Variations* does not seem to formulate spectatorial anxiety very well. Bach's music sympathizes with neither victim nor audience, and because affectively this music makes an unlikely surrogate for how we might imagine a psycho *should* feel while using a pocket knife to remove a face, we seem not to be fully engaged with Lecter's emotional perspective.

Anempathy affords no musical and affective congruency of audience, victim and psychopath but instead articulates clear divisions between them. Like a prism, anempathy diffracts the scene into its component elements. The psychopath becomes a dramatic domain whose affective separation and distance from both victim and audience is ensured by a musical treatment that dispels their amalgamation. Relative to the more traditional strategy of intimacy, the anempathetic approach takes us a step closer to the individuation of the psycho-killer's personality.

Anempathy and individuation

While clearly providing an unexpected stylistic flourish, musical anempathy yields more than a novel sense of generic opposition. A marked disagreement between music and the other elements in a scene engenders a distancing that may become expressively particular. In Rahn's terms we might say that musical anempathy opens up a space for description, for a separate 'it' as a sign. Anempathy highlights our expectations by thwarting or negating them. The fact that Bach forms an uncomfortable fit makes us very aware of having anticipated something else – a different accompaniment to Lecter's bloody image. When exposed, such expectations reveal their details – features that project themselves onto our reception of a scene. Anempathy leads us back to the more specific terms in which its oppositions ground themselves, and therefore affords the opportunity to 'read' a situation in greater detail. The disparity between Bach's music and Lecter's carnage is multifaceted, and charges the characterization of Lecter with a number of meanings.

First, listening to Bach signifies the superiority of Lecter's intellect. The notion that classical music celebrates, acknowledges or even magnifies intelligence is both scientifically and socially disseminated. As Melanie Lowe explains:

> Arising from a neuroscience and music study of Dr. Francis Raucher, Dr. Gordon L. Shaw, and their colleagues at the University of California at Irvine that concluded that listening to just ten minutes of Mozart's music raised students' abstract reasoning ability in spatial-temporal tasks, the 'Mozart Effect' has become an inclusive term referring to the ability of classical music, in particular Mozart, to raise I.Q., assist in concentration, promote health and well being,

and even cure disease. The influence of the Mozart Effect on the current situation of classical music in contemporary American culture can hardly be overstated.[12]

12 Melanie Lowe, 'Claiming Amadeus: classical feedback in American media', *American Music*, vol. 20, no. 1 (2002), p. 119.

As noted, of course, the 'effect' here is not limited solely to Mozart *per se*, and would ostensibly extend to classical music in general and Bach in particular. The larger thrust of Lowe's argument is towards understanding media images, however, and in their applications of classical music the issue becomes not so much the reality of the 'Mozart Effect' as its appearance in musical signification. Whether classical music is actually connected to intelligence is secondary to our *belief* that it is and our willingness to bring that belief to bear on characterizations in film and television. Ultimately, classical music would stand for intelligence even without a proven causal relationship.

Even more specifically, Kristi Brown has described the connection between Bach and Lecter's 'dialectical capacity for meticulously planned, inhuman violence'. Brown sees in Bach's music a metaphor of mechanistic precision that becomes a trope in filmic characterizations of the 'intricate strategy games' of killers.[13] The *Goldberg Variations* works, therefore, on several levels to intensify the paradoxical nature of Lecter's character. Hearing Bach anempathetically pits our assumptions about intelligent behaviour against Lecter's obvious brutality. Lecter violently deflates any notions of music's ability to connect intelligence with civility, writing in blood that Bach's charms have *not* soothed the savage breast.

13 Kristi Brown, 'Perfectly executed: Bach's music, technology, and violence in film', conference paper delivered at annual American Musicological Society national conference, Columbus, Ohio, 2 November 2002.

The oft-described 'precision' or 'mechanistic' aspect of Bach's contrapuntal style is hardly present in the flowing vocal quality of the 'aria' that opens the *Goldberg Variations*, however, and Brown's metaphor of strategy and exactitude does not account for the whole of Lecter's musical characterization. For example, Bach also reinforces Lecter's social class – a topic frequently associated with intellect, but also clearly distinguishable from it. Within *Silence of the Lambs*, and indeed in Ridley Scott's sequel, *Hannibal* (2001), Lecter's relationship to high-culture music marks him out as genteel and elite. His fondness for Bach is an accessory to his professional title, and it also reinforces the artistic aspirations evident in the pseudo-Renaissance drawings he makes of Agent Clarice Starling. The *Goldberg Variations* provides the ideal sonic wallpaper for the prison accommodation constructed for Lecter. This music also accessorizes the English accent that US audiences especially are almost invariably urged to associate with high-class villainy. Overall, the musical metaphor is not simply the machine and the chess match, but the powdered wig and snuff box; Lecter comes across as an effete snob. A large part of the mystique surrounding Lecter is just that – his surroundings. The entirety of his mise-en-scene negates the working-class accents and occupations of the guards who call him 'Doc' and who are destined to become his next

prey. If high-culture music marks Lecter as elite, then it implies contradistinction to a 'low' or popular culture. Though absent as a *sound*, popular culture is nevertheless part of the acoustic here. With music prominent among them, each of Lecter's trappings is designed to elevate him both intellectually and socially above the vulgar, the popular and the common.[14] Lecter cannot suffer the ordinary, and is instead compelled to make the ordinary suffer.

Ultimately, however, the projection of Lecter's class and intelligence merely provides a background for his pathology. Cannibalism is the goal of his psychosis and emerges as an extreme manifestation of his elitism. Lecter's musical preferences serve to intensify the projection of his pathology. The *Goldberg Variations* accompanies the presentation of Lecter's special meal while the camera gently scans the cover of *Bon Appetit* magazine. Lecter is an epicure, and it is worth remembering that the phenomenological model for selectivity in matters of culture is, appropriately, *taste*. Thus even beyond the anempathy of the *Goldberg Variations* itself, the technological source of this music too is telling. Played on his tape recorder, it is a reflection of Lecter's choice. Unlike Shore's nondiegetic score, which characterizes Lecter from without, the *Goldberg Variations* is an aspect of the killer's self-characterization. In all, Lecter's musical affinities are an aural extension of his very particular and peculiar palate – one that combines human liver with fine wine. Listening to Bach underscores Lecter's status as a gourmet or, more appropriately, a *consumer* – one echoing the satire of Jonathan Swift's 'modest proposal' that 'people of quality and fortune' should dine on the lower classes.[15] So, while music characterizes Norman Bates as a categorical psycho, we find in Lecter what can only be described as a more specifically 'fleshed-out' pathology.

Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) offers another notable example of musical anempathy. But unlike Lecter's escape, the torture scene in *Reservoir Dogs* is unadulterated by any more intimate strategy. The result is again a more individuated pathological character, Mr Blonde. During one of the film's most repellently memorable scenes, Mr Blonde has a police officer gagged and bound to a chair. He uses a straight razor to amputate his victim's ear, and then splashes him with gasoline in preparation for immolating him. Unlike *Silence of the Lambs,* the scene dispenses with any empathetic nondiegetic score. At the beginning of the sequence, however, Mr Blonde tunes a table radio to disc jockey K-Billy's radio programme, Super Sounds of the Seventies, just as he cues up Stealers Wheel's bouncy pop tune 'Stuck in the Middle with You'. As with the *Goldberg Variations* in *Silence of the Lambs,* the ironic music here does not bother stating the obvious. The anempathetic music carries no warning of the scene's sadism, and conveys no sense of the victim's suffering; the tune is effusive in its indifference.

But should music care? The fact that torture, mutilation and killing

14 Melanie Lowe's larger argument is also useful here, in that the signifiers of high culture and intellect in media characterizations can also serve to enhance either their comic nature or their villainy. 'What does seem relatively new, however, emerging sometime in the last half of the twentieth century, is middle America's sense that the code of conduct of the elite class is not genuine. Rather, the "initiated", as Levine calls them, "those who had the inclination, the leisure, and the knowledge to appreciate [high culture]" – that is, the wealthy, educated, and even the (merely) intellectually gifted – are affecting not only their appreciation of high art but the whole of their manners. In short, they're phony.' Lowe, 'Claiming Amadeus', p. 112.

15 Jonathan Swift, 'A modest proposal', in *A Modest Proposal and Other Satirical Works* (New York, NY: Dover, 1996).

are serious for the victim and the audience does not necessarily mean that they are equally so for the psycho. Indeed, the very concept of pathological violence lies in its separation from emotion and motivation – an objective insight unlikely to become discernible in more traditional characterizations of horrifically earnest aggression. The lighthearted musical characterization of sadistic torture actually clarifies Mr Blonde's pathological perspective by creating an emotional remove from his violence. In fact emotional and musical detachment may draw Mr Blonde's cruelty even more realistically than musical commitment and intensity ever could. While the song's lyrics may be heard to contain pertinent references or commentary, the upbeat feeling of 'Stuck in the Middle with You' is clearly an emotional non sequitur. Put another way, while empathy conveys consequences, 'Stuck in the Middle with You' wallows in its inconsequentiality. The seamless musical structure of the scene further intensifies this dispassionate aspect of Mr Blonde's sadism. Whereas anempathy in *Silence of the Lambs* at least momentarily yields to monstrous musical intimacy, in *Reservoir Dogs* the soundtrack is abjectly unhesitating through the amputation of an ear. Tarantino's camera may demur at the most horrific moment, but 'Stuck in the Middle with You' continues as testament to Mr Blonde's unflinching demeanour while disfiguring his hostage.

The technological source of the diegetic anempathetic music is again a crucial component of its characterization. 'Stuck in the Middle with You' plays on the radio – a very different medium than the audio cassette tape, with different social implications. The invisible K-Billy is in charge of choosing the music. Appearing in his broadcast, 'Stuck in the Middle with You' is literally 'distant', and does not reflect Mr Blonde's personal taste as directly as Lecter's tape of Bach. This serendipitous appearance of the tune reinforces its anempathy as Mr Blonde's exploitation of the uncontrolled, coincidental accompaniment speaks further of his emotional detachment from cruelty. The tune actually serves to deflate the sense of intention and purpose. Or, in Brown's terms, there is no projection of an 'intricate strategy' here. This is *not* Mr Blonde's music, and yet he appears fully able to feed off its energy. Mr Blonde is an improviser, not a planner. Indeed, his playful, toying dance before the act of mutilation takes the ironic combination of pop pep with torture a step further. His whimsical shuffling literally embodies the anempathy, making it as visible as it is audible, spectacular as well as emotional.

All the while, the semiotic coding of the tune is now towards pop culture. The high-art indulgence of *Silence of the Lambs* reinforces Lecter's individuality, distancing him from the victims and spectators while discouraging direct identification. In *Reservoir Dogs*, however, the anempathy is grounded in the popular. Far from formulating distress through the music, spectators of *Reservoir Dogs* may find themselves having to resist the now guilty pleasure of a catchy dance

groove that draws them towards identifying with Mr Blonde. This psycho is presented as just an 'average guy' whose musical tastes are neither elevated nor elevating. Whereas Lecter was an aristocrat among psychotics, Mr Blonde is the everymaniac. He performs the unspeakable to what K-Billy calls 'bubble gum' pop. In *Silence of the Lambs*, class and intellect formulate a failed opposition to cruelty; here shallowness and triviality fail to reflect the ostensible solemnity of sadism.

With our musical expectations of Dr Lecter and Mr Blonde we enter an interesting double bind: someone with a fondness for serious music should not be doing what Lecter does, but, at the same time, popular music seemingly lacks the gravitas to reflect an 'appropriate' measure of Mr Blonde's violence.[16] We can find precursors to this dilemma in the figure of Alex, 'a young man whose principal interests are rape, ultra-violence and Beethoven', from *A Clockwork Orange*.[17] In both Stanley Kubrick's film (1972) and Anthony Burgess's novel (1962) the same ingredients of cruelty and music are present, along with the stirring disparity between actions and musical characterization that we find later in Tarantino's and Demme's film maniacs. The mix for Alex is very different, however. He is both driven and characterized by the high-culture premiss of Beethoven and Rossini, and most of the film's violence is choreographed to 'art music'. In assaulting even his own friends, Alex seizes on the inspiration of classical music. In the film's most infamous scene, on the other hand, Alex rapes a woman after performing the title tune from the musical *Singin' in the Rain* (1952). Neither music seems 'right' for what Alex does.

The pretence of music as a civilizing force is one of the explicit themes in *A Clockwork Orange*, of course, and the disparity between Alex's recreational 'ultra-violence' and his love of Beethoven is not merely a musical strategy but a much deeper exploration of his personality. Like many latter-day film psychopaths, Alex is intelligent, sympathetic *and* vicious. But by enlisting classical music to catalyze and intensify his violent fantasies and acts, for example, Alex emerges as completely aware of its ecstatic powers over him. His characteristic self-conscious exploration of free will through violence – 'what I do I do because I like to do' – is thus magnificently conveyed in the anempathy of music appearing both as his 'hobby' and as a soundtrack.[18] The three figures then, Alex, Dr Lecter and Mr Blonde, are decidedly differentiated and not at all interchangeable on a music-affective level. The divergent film styles of Kubrick, Demme and Tarantino aside, Lecter's 'rudeness' at devouring someone to a ditty like 'Singin' in the Rain' would be as 'vulgar' and impossible to imagine as Mr Blonde's cowboy boots and black suit becoming mildewed in the stuffy air of Bach. Musical anempathy opens a 'separate space' through which we avoid the homogenization inherent in musical descriptions that focus on pathological *aggression* rather than on pathological *characters*.

16 It is, of course, not necessarily the case that the use of popular music to accompany violence would result in anempathy. Apart from the use of L7's 'Shitlist' in Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* (1994), cited later, an example such as Powermad's 'Slaughterhouse' in the opening of David Lynch's *Wild at Heart* (1990) might come to mind. Here, the aggression of the tune seems perfectly congruent with Sailor's violent manslaughter in self-defence. And in a completely different emotional domain, the airiness of Nena's '99 Luftballoons' captures perfectly the momentary remorse and disorientation of hitman Martin Blank as he dispatches a would-be assassin in George Armitage's *Grosse Point Blank* (1997).

17 The quote is from the film's original tagline.

18 Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), pp. 29–34.

The anempathetic technique seems capable of rendering subtle but useful shades of individuation even when exploiting apparently similar resources. In David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986), we find another anempathetically characterized maniac, Frank Booth. At one point, Booth verbally terrorizes and pummels a hapless captive, Jeffrey, to the sound of an audio cassette recording of Roy Orbison's 'In Dreams'. Before his entourage, Booth beats his victim to unconsciousness while a woman dances atop a car and gyrates blissfully to Orbison's sentimental tune. The technique of anempathetically accompanying intense violence with a mellifluous song and dance offers at least a stylistic point of comparison with *Reservoir Dogs*. The effect in *Blue Velvet*, however, is a menace of manifestly different pathology. The immediate source of distinction lies in the fact that 'In Dreams' is more obviously significant to Frank Booth than 'Stuck in the Middle with You' is to Mr Blonde. Michael Atkinson describes the scene as follows:

> This scene manifests most clearly the role that pop songs play in Lynch's, and Frank's, cosmology: as sweet, innocuous tissues of lies. Like Lynch, whose adoration of pop music belies a cynical fascination with its daydreamy innocence, Frank is drawn to them even as they enrage him with their betrayals, their false sense of hope. It's obvious that the film's songs mean something radically different to Frank than they do to anyone else ('love letter' equals 'bullets' etc.). In any case, 'In Dreams' is apparently Frank's credo, at least as far as Jeffrey's concerned, in whose dreams Frank imagines he 'walks' etc.[19]

Booth urgently commands that his tape be played during his assault on Jeffrey. Unlike Mr Blonde's, Booth's relationship to this tune is therefore far from incidental, but even more than Lecter's choice of Bach in *Silence of the Lambs*, Booth's musical selection becomes a type of self-characterization. Lecter's relationship to the *Goldberg Variations* comes across as that of a music lover, a connoisseur who appreciates the value of things like great music and fine wine on their own terms. In seeing Booth's personal response to 'In Dreams', on the other hand, we understand that his very *connection* to this music is pathological. As Atkinson continues, 'the homosexual subtext of this scene is barely "sub", but it's all scrambled up with the various and conflicting Oedipal hungers being played out; Frank can't make out if he's the Daddy, the Mommy or the Baby any more'.[20] Unlike Lecter, Booth is not so much a music enthusiast as he is a prisoner of this tune, which appears to him only on his own pathological terms.

Simon Frith writes that among the social functions of popular music is the creation for ourselves of 'a particular sort of self definition' as well as 'managing the relationship between our public and private emotional lives'.[21] However perversely, no one exemplifies these functions more explicitly than Booth, both as a character and as the

19 Michael Atkinson, *Blue Velvet* (London: British Film Institute, 1997), p. 61.

20 Ibid.

21 Simon Frith, 'Towards an aesthetic of popular music', in Richard Leppert and Susan McClary (eds), *Music and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 140–41.

result of Lynch's filmic construction. 'In Dreams' is the remnant of some earlier trauma that becomes audible both to us and to him through its lyrics and melody. The tune appears first in an earlier scene in which Booth's friend, Ben, lip synchs it for him. Booth winces at what seems to be a culminating moment of both nostalgic pleasure and pain – 'In Dreams' seems to serve as a means of recall. A further purpose of music, Frith notes, is 'to "stop" time, to make us feel we are living within a moment'.[22] Unlike Lecter's characterization through the *Goldberg Variations*, the Roy Orbison tune articulates Booth's damaged past. Twice referring to the song by its first line, 'a candy-colored clown', Booth tracks, mouths and recites the lyrics nostalgically in what appears to be an echo of events whose traces still haunt him. He is apparently being transported to a significant moment that the tune recreates for him again and again – a moment perhaps intimately connected with his damage. Reflecting on our perceptions of Hannibal Lecter, Mr Blonde, or even Alex, we might find little hint, musical or otherwise, of their pathogenesis. Booth's personality, however, has an audible past, one that feels subterranean and yet also very present. As Atkinson puts it, 'what *Blue Velvet* gives us that lasts long after the shock and laughter have faded is its vibrant evocation of a secret history, both personal and social, literal and psychological'.[23] Booth's fixation on 'In Dreams' rivals that which he has for the fetishistic object of the film's title song, and musically extends his erotic paraphilias. So while Lecter's taste for Bach forms an auditory intensification of his cannibalism, 'In Dreams' embodies the formation of at least part of Booth's malformed psychosexual appetites.

22 Ibid., p. 142.

23 Atkinson, *Blue Velvet*, p. 54.

Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* (1994) offers another example of an anempathetic music that implies both the nature and origins of a psychopathology. As Mickey and Mallory, a romantically linked pair of serial killers, brutally murder Mallory's father, the action is accompanied by a nondiegetic score that clearly refers to the musical style of composer Carl Stalling's music for many of Warner Brothers' Bugs Bunny and Road Runner cartoons. Complete with a comic musical punctuation when they smash the father's skull, the score attempts to lighten the tone of the action to an even greater degree than Rossini's scurrying *Thieving Magpie* overture does during the gang fight in *A Clockwork Orange*. In Kubrick's film the violence does indeed resemble the sort of choreographed fluidity of a ballet or an animated conflict. But the cultural code of the music in *Natural Born Killers* refers us to the brutal high jinks of a cartoon even as the language and action of the scene are deadly serious and graphically realistic. Stanley Cavell's contrast of cartoons and horror is particularly relevant in the context of Stone's film:

> Cartoon violence can be funny because while it can be very brutal it cannot be bloody. Cartoon tenderness and loss is tenderness and loss

maximized, or purified. Cartoon terror is absolute, because since the body is not destructible, the threat is to the soul itself. (This is different from horror movies. There the threat is not of isolation through abandonment or annihilation, but of isolation through unacknowledgeable disfigurement. They play upon the fear that cartoons laugh at: irreversible metamorphosis.)[24]

24 Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 171.

The anempathetic cartoon music is a fascinating choice for the scene, for it clearly encodes violence while at the same time reorienting any appropriate sense of its consequence. In musically cross-pollinating the cartoon and the psycho, a horrific moment laughs at unacknowledgeable disfigurement.

The 'inappropriateness' of the score, however, may again be a matter of interpretation. In *Natural Born Killers*, Mickey and Mallory's alternate sense of perspective becomes a salient issue in their characterization. The film's frenetic and disjunctive editing, frequent oscillation between film stocks, and modulation into television- and animation-style imagery fosters an acute awareness of media *qua* media. Entering both thematically and technically into the larger cultural debate on 'violence and the media', Stone's film presents the perceptions of its main characters in part as media constructions. As such, the gap between 'reality' and 'representation' becomes emphatic in their personalities. In murdering Mallory's father, that gap is amplified by music that audibly refers to a very familiar type of alternate (that is, childhood) reality and representation: cartoons. Whether Mickey and Mallory are aware of the break themselves, the spectator has musical access to their fractured perception. And taken either literally or metaphorically, the disparity of sound and action provides a momentary glimpse into an aspect of their condition: intense and profound delusion.

Once again, imagining this particular musical characterization applied to any of the other psychos considered so far proves valuable in understanding just how musically and affectively individuated they are. To both Hannibal Lecter and Alex, for example, cartoon music would sustain neither the high-culture premiss nor the promise of an 'ecstatic consciousness'. And even apart from the lack of significant lyrics and voice, cartoon music would lack the requisite sentimentality for Frank Booth's psychodrama. Mr Blonde might seem to be the most likely match for the signification of the kind of gleeful brutality found in a cartoon, but then the very directness of that wry musical comparison, especially appearing as a non-diegetic commentary, would instantly dilute the sense of casualness so crucial to his violence.

Musical anempathy and personality disorders

All of these scenes are horrifically memorable and well executed, of course, and after a single viewing it is difficult to imagine them as

having been realized in any other way. Just as imagining a commutation of their soundtracks creates the feeling that the music is out of place or 'wrong', so the characterizations of the particular pathologies implied, signified or supported by the music seem not to be interchangeable. The extremely dysfunctional sense of reality signified for Mickey and Mallory through the use of a cartoon soundtrack seems uncharacteristic of Lecter, who remains hyperaware of every nuance of his surroundings. Conversely, Mickey and Mallory's romantic partnership in their killing spree binds them into an isolated social unit, but one without the sense of status or exclusivity sounded by Lecter's music. As psychopathologies go, their respective *symptoms* are different. Stepping back from the construction of characters in these films, we can see that the strategy of musical anempathy has allowed at least some basic individuation of their mental dysfunctions to resonate. Differences emerge not only in personalities, but in the personality *disorders* implied as well.

These disorders are clearly distinguishable from each other, and perhaps even specifically identifiable. For instance, the kind of break with reality signified by the cartoon music in *Natural Born Killers* can be read as a salient feature of the so-called 'schizotypal' personality disorder.[25] With symptoms that include 'odd beliefs or magical thinking', 'cognitive or perceptual distortions' and 'inappropriate or constricted affect', Mickey and Mallory are far more specifically developed than the generic appellation 'psycho' and its concomitant music would convey.

25 *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, fourth edition (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1994), pp. 644–5 (commonly referred to as *DSM-IV*).

Moreover, their anempathetic musical characterizations frequently underscore this schizotypal disturbance. In the film's opening rampage, Mickey and Mallory mutilate and kill four people in a diner. While Mallory kicks and beats her dance partner to the riot-grrrl aggression of L7's 'Shitlist' (a pop tune that is *not* anempathetic), Mickey's bullet and knife both find their targets to the extremely dark humour of brief *operatic* musical interjections from Berg's *Wozzeck* and Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* – bursts of song from fully trained voices. These are not presented as signs of high culture, however, but rather as if to recall that 'it ain't over 'til the fat lady sings' – and here she is now. After the slaughter, the pair embrace passionately to the string romance of 'La Vie en Rose', which then gives way to a hallucinatory opening credit sequence accompanied by a fragmented musical collage. A later vignette entitled 'I Love Mallory' chronicles the young girl's horrific home life, including her molestation by her father. The soundtrack is that of a 1950s sitcom, complete with laughter track and comically mincing musical cues. An anempathetic soundtrack thus frequently serves as an evocative reminder in *Natural Born Killers* that 'reality' is out of reach for its main characters.

While Lecter too emerges as something more than a generic 'psycho', he is not cut from the same schizotypal cloth as Mickey and Mallory. Both behaviourally and musically, Lecter is more clearly

discernible as a 'narcissistic personality'. The description of this pathology in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* fits Lecter very well:

> Individuals with Narcissistic Personality Disorder believe that they are superior, special, or unique and expect others to recognize them as such. They may feel that they can only be understood by, and should only associate with, other people who are special or of high status and may attribute 'unique,' 'perfect,' or 'gifted' qualities to those with whom they associate. Individuals with this disorder believe that their needs are special and beyond the ken of ordinary people.[26]

26 Ibid., p. 658.

Like the rest of the mise-en-scene, the diegetic music that accompanies Lecter's prison cell carnage is appropriately an enhancement and enactment of his status. The *Goldberg Variations* signifies the superiority of his intellect, taste and social standing not only to the spectator but to Lecter himself.

A similarly narcissistic effect – perhaps an overt reference to *Silence of the Lambs* – is more recently evident in Bryan Singer's *X2: X-Men United* (2003). Magneto, whose driving motivation is his sense of superiority, inhabits a prison cell constructed just for him. He has a British accent which, like Lecter's, distinguishes him from his captors, and of course the musical accompaniment to the scenes is the quintessential media representation of high culture – Mozart.

Lest we think that high culture is the only frame for the portrait of a narcissist, however, we can turn to the figure of Patrick Bateman in Mary Harron's film of Bret Easton Ellis's novel, *American Psycho* (2000). The film is largely *about* the main character's pathological narcissism, placing it in the context of a critique of vacant Reagan-era materialism. Bateman's narcissism is on full display when, for example, while having sex with two women he postures and admires only himself in the mirror. He uses the style section of the New York Times to absorb his victim's blood and designer luggage to dispose of their bodies.

Any musical enactment of Bateman's pathology therefore appears less urgent, and the soundtrack indeed seems more broadly conceived. While *American Psycho* relies primarily on John Cales's traditional scoring to characterize most of its horror, Bateman's aspirational sense of fashion frequently justifies the film's focus on popular music both in the narrative and on the soundtrack. While Hannibal Lecter is attuned to the enduring value of great things, Bateman's money allows indulgence in a specialist's sense of 'the latest'. He enjoys giving his victims long and detailed dissertations on the subtle virtues of his newest CDs, which, it must be remembered, were still a status commodity in the 1980s. Like everything else in his life, Bateman's taste in music is meant to demonstrate his imagined superiority. He can barely stomach it, for instance, when a detective investigating the

disappearance of one of his victims purchases a copy of a CD that he himself owns. For all its *talk* about popular music, however, the film contains really only a single clearly anempathetically accompanied slaughter: Huey Lewis's 'Hip to be Square' plays on Bateman's stereo as he playfully hacks a victim to death with an axe. This moment is certainly a musical enactment of his narcissistic shallowness and materialism, but one already superseded by the abundant support of other such signifiers in the film.

The gangster Mr Blonde, on the other hand, seems developed in a way that makes him an 'anti-social' – the disorder actually referred to formerly as the 'psychopath' or 'sociopath'.[27] The diagnostic criteria are more in line with the blueprint for the generic psycho: 'failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviors as indicated by repeatedly performing acts that are grounds for arrest', 'use of aliases', 'reckless disregard for the safety of self or others', 'impulsivity or failure to plan ahead', 'lack of remorse, as indicated by being indifferent to or rationalizing having hurt, mistreated, or stolen from another'.[28] Mr Blonde's 'lack of remorse' is fully evident as he jokingly asks 'can you hear me?' of his victim's severed ear before casually tossing it aside. Moreover, the 'reckless disregard' so symptomatic of the 'anti-social' accurately describes the scene's musical underpinning. The pop-rock bounciness of 'Stuck in the Middle with You' is an emotionally noncommittal sound effect or 'noise', even, that runs interference between spectator, psycho, and the more socially sanctioned reactions of sympathy and guilt. Could there be a more direct example of Jacques Attali's notion of 'music as a tool of power', held out here as a way of 'making people forget the fear of violence'?[29]

Similarly, acknowledging the deeper specification of 'In Dreams' makes it hard to agree fully with Atkinson's characterization of Frank Booth as an 'all purpose socio-path', now a vague and archaic term in medical parlance.[30] Wholly apart from its actual sound, for example, it matters to the meaning of music whether it is *performed* or simply heard. In *Blue Velvet* it is essential to remember that the anempathetic use of 'In Dreams' more than once takes the form of a musical *performance*. In its first appearance at a gathering of Booth's extended entourage, Booth's friend, Ben, plays the tape at Frank's command. Lip-synching into a hand-held utility light that illuminates him like a stage performer, Ben suavely but silently mouths 'In Dreams' until Frank becomes too affected by its personal significance for the show to go on. A short time later, during his attack on Jeffrey, Booth's face is illuminated by a flashlight-cum-spotlight as he recites the song's lyrics. During part of the recitation, Booth uses his left hand as a kind of puppet which also mouths the lyrics. Booth clearly requires not only a victim, but an audience and a venue for his theatrical cruelty, which in turn seems 'performed'. As Atkinson suggests, 'everywhere Frank goes, someone is trying to appease him through ritualized

27 Ibid., p. 645.

28 Ibid., pp. 649–50.

29 Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 19.

30 Atkinson, *Blue Velvet*, p. 45.

psychodrama, and it always fails'.[31] But far from Atkinson's 'all purpose' characterization, Booth seems pathologically bent on drawing attention to himself. The inverse of Mr Blonde's casual relationship to 'Stuck in the Middle with You', Booth's nostalgically perverse investment in Orbison's tune strongly suggests the so-called 'histrionic' disorder's penchant for extreme emotional exaggeration. The histrionic's symptoms clearly include salient characterizations of Booth: 'shows self-dramatization, theatricality, and exaggerated expression of emotion', 'is uncomfortable in situations in which he or she is not the center of attention', 'displays rapidly shifting and shallow expression of emotions', and so on.[32] 'In Dreams' is therefore not only a way of connecting to Booth's psychogenesis, but the tune's *performance* becomes, in effect, the means of realizing a salient part of the histrionic pathology. The very presentation of this music is indicative of a specific personality suffering from a particular disorder.

31 Ibid., p. 59.

32 *DSM-IV*, pp. 657–8.

Anempathy and the mechanisms of affect

Ultimately, musical anempathy sounds as if it is premissed on irony but its effects are paradoxically far from insincere. Objectivity requires distance of some kind, and the arm's length at which anempathetic music appears to hold its subject seems to bring detail into focus. By comparison, such effects are largely inconceivable in the traditional score, however well crafted it may be. The affective homogeneity in traditional scores lies not in any homogeneity or deficiency in their musical details, but rather in the similarity and orientation of strategy. That is, while Herrmann's score for *Psycho* is clearly well crafted, unique, powerful and horrific, it nevertheless draws us inexorably towards the same affective goal as, say, J.M. Pagan's score for *Anguish* (1986) or Manfredini's music for *Friday the 13th*. Even the timbral novelty of the synthesizer soundtrack in Carpenter's *Halloween* nevertheless employs essentially the same angst-laden vocabulary of musical threat. Directed towards the intimate amalgamation of victim, psycho and audience, the emotional outcome remains the same even when the means and details differ. Musical anempathy, in contrast, opens spaces for description more finely articulated than the level of resolution in generic negative affect.

Anempathy also has the power to create radically different and unexpected affective states that may be complex or even pleasurably ambiguous – are we afraid or not? In those terms, for example, there is no ambiguity at all in *Psycho*'s shower scene: we are drenched in unmistakable angst. While the intimate strategy intensifies and clarifies drama through fusing its components, anempathy generates its energy through fission – splitting and redirecting the music-affective bonds between characters and spectators. Indeed, the very mechanisms of music-emotional communication appear to become scrambled and problematic. The psycho-musicological discourse on affect, oriented

towards 'emotivist' and 'cognitivist' perspectives, provides a useful model here. As Smith summarizes: 'cognitivist theories of musical affect assert that music can signify emotional meanings to listeners, but cannot arouse them. Emotivist theories, on the other hand, contend that music not only can but also sometimes does arouse emotional responses in listeners.'[33] The emotivist perspective, then, would seem to work quite well for Herrmann's score to *Psycho*'s shower scene, in which the music itself delivers a palpable shock independently of the images. Emotivism is far less workable, however, in describing Lecter's ecstatic bliss as he stands conducting the *Goldberg Variations* after his lethal rampage. There, it becomes far more plausible to suggest that his state of mind is being signified to the spectator, who may *understand* it but still remains unlikely to 'feel' it themselves.

33 Smith, 'Movie music as moving music', p. 148.

These differences are evidence for Smith's ultimate contention that 'spectators make sense of film music's affective properties on a number of different levels, and that these levels can best be understood within a combination of cognitivist and emotivist theories of musical affect'.[34] Smith's pragmatism is clearly needed, for example, in understanding the anempathy in *Natural Born Killers*. We can easily interpret the cartoon-like music semiotically as a cultural code of cartoon violence – a cognitivist approach. But we have to acknowledge here, as we must also with Mr Blonde, that if the spectator 'feels' little or nothing by way of musical empathy, then the music *has* in effect aroused a fair degree of the characteristic pathological emotional detachment. Distance is also a 'feeling'.

34 Ibid.

Apart from blurring the general mechanisms of musical emotion, anempathy effectively cross-circuits the more natively filmic music-affective relationships as well. These are essentially twofold in Smith's account. Affective 'polarization' occurs when 'the specific affective character of the music moves the content of the picture toward the emotional pole communicated by the music'.[35] His description of 'affective congruency', on the other hand, 'refers to a type of cross-modal confirmation in which the spectator matches the score's affective components to the emotional shading of narrative'.[36] With its seemingly literal musical incongruity, it would be tempting to view anempathy as an extreme form of 'polarization'. The 'shading of narrative', however, assumes an absolute or at least a common sense of reality that is inherently betrayed by psychopathological perceptions. Perhaps 'Stuck in the Middle with You', for example, can be understood as moving the content towards another emotional pole. In amplifying Mr Blonde's anti-social perspective, however, the tune's 'mechanical texture', as Chion might call it, already *is* 'congruent' with this character.[37] All bets are off in ironic or pathological emotional landscapes, which is perhaps what makes them such a dynamic or 'pleasurable', if that word can be used here, point of emotional confusion for the spectator.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Chion, *Audio-Vision*, p. 9.

We might think of anempathetic music as a kind of expressive manipulation of emotional confusion. In any case, understanding it as a

mode of characterization ultimately begs the question of whether the very notion of anempathy is merely an artefact of having privileged a certain perspective in the first place. Is it ironic, or simply a type of 'sympathy with the devil'? Music becomes ironic or anempathetic largely because it disagrees with what we take to be either the victim's reaction or the spectator's 'appropriate' empathy with the victim's plight. Why do we assume this perspective in the first place? Is there any real reason that the musical drama could not focus on the 'antagonists'? Surrendering the music to them, so to speak, may indeed earn an accusation of flippant cruelty by eroding audience identification with the victim. Nevertheless, the moment we explore and make complex the personality of filmic killers, move from expressionism to embrace, say, such agendas as 'realism' or even 'de-centredness', we give our psychos legitimate claim to greater depth of characterization on their own terms.

Perhaps anempathy's most disturbing subversion therefore lies less in ironizing graphic violence than in undermining or mocking the magical thinking that finds redemptive powers in a spectator's sympathy. Without a partner in suffering – without intimacy – the prey is left truly alone. While Marion Crane is both literally and figuratively 'accompanied' by Herrmann's empathetic score, Mr Blonde's now one-eared hostage is literally and symbolically 'cut off' from the tune that happens to be playing on the radio at that moment. And unlike Norman Bates's victim, the recipient of Frank Booth's (who is, incidentally, also an ear amputator) rage is left alienated from the sound of his own suffering. There is only the music of Booth's nostalgia, confusion and failed catharsis, which leaves room for nothing else. With their music-affective voices muted, the isolation, abandonment and annihilation of the victims, to use Cavell's terms, now feel complete and absolute. Maybe we have paradoxically arrived at a fuller understanding of victim, killer and pathological violence after all: the real irony of anempathy is heard not in its music, but in the silence it creates.

Popular genres and cultural legitimacy: Fassbinder's *Lola* and the legacy of 1950s West German cinema

TIM BERGFELDER

Thomas Elsaesser suggested in 1996 that in the one-and-a-half decades since Rainer Werner Fassbinder's death, his 'lifestyle and the posthumous revelations about it have invariably upstaged the films, it seemed if one wanted to understand the films, one had to look at his life'.[1] Six years later, the observation that Fassbinder's work has 'though not exactly vanished, undergone a strange transformation' still holds; indeed the transformation of Fassbinder's legacy continues.[2]

One would think that Fassbinder's status as one of the most prolific auteurs of post-World War II European art cinema ought to be assured, and he is certainly remembered and promoted in this way by his admirers and former collaborators. In terms of a concrete cinematic legacy, Fassbinder, who frequently drew on other films and filmmakers in his highly cineliterate work, has in turn become a model for a new generation of filmmakers. Sheila Johnston perceives traces and influences of Fassbinder in Lars von Trier, Atom Egoyan, Aki Kaurismäki, Gregg Araki, Pedro Almodóvar and Krzysztof Kieślowski.[3] More explicitly, Fassbinder has been a source of inspiration for Francois Ozon, who adapted a hitherto unfilmed Fassbinder play as well as fashioning a 'Fassbinder look' for his *Gouttes d'eau sur pierres brûlantes* (2000), and for Todd Haynes, whose early film *Poison* (1991) echoes Fassbinder's final film *Querelle* (1981). Haynes's highly acclaimed recent homage to Douglas Sirk, *Far*

1 Thomas Elsaesser, *Fassbinder's Germany: History, Identity, Subject* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), p. 7.

2 Ibid.

3 Sheila Johnston, 'A fast life and changing times', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 9, no. 2 (1999), p. 29.

From Heaven (2002), meanwhile, has undoubtedly been channelled through Fassbinder's reception of Sirk.[4]

The erstwhile scandal of Fassbinder's publicly enacted private melodrama (his drugtaking, the sadomasochistic relations amongst his entourage), which Elsaesser in 1996 feared were usurping or overshadowing the memory of 'a filmmaker for Germany, a filmmaker about Germany',[5] appears to have receded somewhat in importance as far as contemporary reception is concerned. But equally, as Ozon's and Haynes's use of Fassbinder's work indicates, the inseparability of his aesthetics from its original political and cultural context can no longer be taken for granted, and has given way to playful, formalist quotation that transcends national and historical specificity. Ozon's and Haynes's postmodern appropriation of Fassbinder finds equivalence in the methodologies that have informed the director's international academic reception in recent years; in other words critical analyses have often either centred on purely formal aspects, or have approached his work through the frameworks of camp and queer theory.[6]

Research in German film history, meanwhile, has over the last two decades moved towards hitherto neglected periods such as the Wilhelmine era and the immediate postwar years (particularly in the GDR), or previously ignored fields of investigation such as popular genres and stars. Methodologies which have come to dominate are often centred on economic and technological developments, and aim to explore specifically the aesthetic and institutional continuities that characterize German film history.[7] Within these critical parameters, Fassbinder's association with auteurist discourse and with a national art cinema that was always defiantly and haughtily anti-populist, does not seem immediately promising, while the concept of a 'unique', self-directed and self-determined genius, which has been particularly pronounced in the critical reception of Fassbinder, may appear impossibly idealistic, romantic and ahistorical.

Of course, this paradigm shift is not just a feature in German film studies – witness, for example, the gradual disappearance from academic discourse and university curricula of once towering figures of European and international art cinema such as Federico Fellini, or two influential contemporaries from the 1970s with whom Fassbinder has often been compared, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Nagisa Oshima.[8] Nevertheless, in Fassbinder's case there may be a specifically national angle to this shift. As Elsaesser suggests, particularly damaging for Fassbinder's legacy was the effective disappearance after German unification of the sociopolitical context to which Fassbinder's work had always referred – the 'old' Federal Republic:

> because his topographical and emotional home, West Germany, formally ceased to exist in 1990, the changing balance of forces in Europe brought Germany not only out of its political quarantine, but

4 Richard Falcon, 'Magnificent obsession', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2003), pp. 12–15.

5 Elsaesser, *Fassbinder's Germany*, p. 7.

6 Recent articles in this vein include Johannes von Moltke, 'Camping in the art closet: the politics of camp and nation in German film', *New German Critique*, no. 63 (Autumn 1994), pp. 76–106; Andy Medhurst, 'The long take: still unnerving after all these years', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 6, no. 2 (1996), pp. 20–24; Therese Grisham, 'Processes of subjectification in Fassbinder's *I Only Want You To Love Me*', *Screen*, vol. 40, no. 4 (1999), pp. 423–45; Olga Solovieva, 'You are what you wear in *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*', *Film Comment*, vol. 38, no. 6 (2002), pp. 53–6.

7 For a discussion of this paradigm shift, see the introduction in Tim Bergfelder, Erica Carter and Deniz Göktürk (eds), *The German Cinema Book* (London: British Film Institute, 2002), pp. 1–12.

8 Elsaesser, *Fassbinder's Germany*, p. 245.

also put an end to the morose, yet often self-laceratingly direct introspection which perhaps was Fassbinder's chief contribution to world cinema .[9]

9 Ibid., pp. 239–40.

The aim of this essay is to propose one possible way out of the critical impasse that I have outlined above. This is by explicitly reintegrating Fassbinder's work into not just the political, but also the cultural history of West Germany, and into the continuities of German film history in particular. Fassbinder's place within the development of cinematic conventions in German cinema, and his own understanding of, and creative engagement with, such traditions, remains one of the few underexplored themes of his oeuvre. By contrast, Fassbinder's connections to Hollywood and US counterculture are well documented, partly through his own writings on proclaimed artistic 'father figures' such as Sirk and Michael Curtiz,[10] and through the liberal references to, and quotations of, Hollywood icons, genres and stars in his films, and partly through the interpretations of (often) Anglo-US reviews and critical studies. The latter have frequently concentrated on the transnationally familiar elements of Fassbinder's work, but more often than not overlooked the more oblique nationally specific references. It is notable that interpretations of Fassbinder's films through the critical lens of melodrama theory (and with Hollywood melodrama as the point of comparison) have been more pronounced in Anglo-US writings on Fassbinder than in German ones.[11]

10 First published in *Fernsehen und Film*, February 1971, reprinted in, among others, Michael Töteberg, *Rainer Werner Fassbinder: Filme befreien den Kopf* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1984); for an English translation, see 'Six films by Douglas Sirk', trans. Thomas Elsaesser, in Laura Mulvey and Jon Halliday (eds), *Douglas Sirk* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Film Festival, 1972).

11 The classical example here is Laura Mulvey's 1974 article 'Fassbinder and Sirk', reprinted in Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989). Recent interpretations in a similar vein include, Marsha Kinder, 'Ideological parody in the New German Cinema', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, vol. 12, nos 1–2 (1990), pp. 73–103; Jane Shattuc, *Tabloid and Tears: Fassbinder and Popular Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

12 Wallace Steadman Watson, *Understanding Rainer Werner Fassbinder: Film as Private and Public Art* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), p. 14; Michael Töteberg, *Rainer Werner Fassbinder* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2002), p. 17.

13 Elsaesser, *Fassbinder's Germany*, p. 146.

Unlike his affinities for Hollywood, Fassbinder's reception of German cinema, and the influence of this tradition on his work, is complex and not easy to reconstruct. According to his biographers, the young Fassbinder was an avid, almost daily cinemagoer in the 1950s, and although the reference is usually to 'Westerns' and other Hollywood imports,[12] there can be no doubt that Fassbinder, along with the majority of West German audiences, watched and enjoyed the popular indigenous *Heimatfilme*, comedies and melodramas of the time, as well as the Ufa, Terra, and Tobis productions from the 1930s and 1940s which were rereleased in West German cinemas during this period, and which would have included the early Ufa assignments of Sirk (then known as Detlef Sierck). In later years, Fassbinder certainly never shared the Oedipal antipathy towards, and uncompromising rejection of, 'Daddy's cinema' that characterized the attitude of other post-Oberhausen auteurs. As Elsaesser suggests, he 'never felt the need to draw a sharp line between himself and the cinema of the 1940s and 1950s in order to become either productive or a "self"'.[13]

Yet despite his evocative essay on Sirk's Hollywood melodramas and his tantalizingly suggestive fragment on Curtiz, not to mention his interventions in debates concerning the aims and directions of the New German Cinema, there is little in Fassbinder's own words that explicitly engages with German film history, affirmative or otherwise.

One of the few acknowledgments of 1950s cinema in his writings is the decidedly backhanded compliment for Liselotte Pulver's and Marianne Koch's performances in Sirk's films, which Fassbinder contrasts with their alleged awfulness (encapsulated in the untranslatable epithet *Knattermimen*) in German cinema.[14] Beyond this brief reference there are anecdotes, such as his reputed admiration for 1950s screen icon Romy Schneider, or the allegation that Sierck's two German Zarah Leander vehicles, *La Habanera* and *Zu neuen Ufern/To New Shores* (1937) were among Fassbinder's favourite films.[15] While this may be the case, as Alice Kuzniar has pointed out, his influential essay on Sirk 'barely mentions' the director's 'previous career in Nazi Germany'.[16]

In retrospect, one should not underestimate the provocative force of Fassbinder's paean to Sirk in the context of early 1970s West German cultural politics – as an emigre Sirk was an uncomfortable reminder of the past for the political Right, while his earlier involvement with Nazi cinema made him deeply suspect to the Left. Although one can only speculate why Fassbinder refrained from particularly emphasizing Sirk's Ufa background, Sirk's status as an all-round political misfit in the West German context may have been precisely what attracted Fassbinder, who would of course have seen himself in similar terms.[17] Sirk's association with Hollywood, on the other hand, and particularly his preference for melodrama, provided the basis for a counter-aesthetic to the bourgeois cultural values prevalent in West Germany.

Fassbinder's appropriation of Sirk had a much bigger impact in the Anglo-US critical context, coinciding with the canonization of Sirk as Brechtian auteur, and the theoretical reevaluation of melodrama as a genre in the early to mid 1970s. In Germany, by contrast, Sirk has remained a controversial figure, precisely because of his implication in German cinema history.[18] As Kuzniar argues, 'Detlef Sierck haunts as an absent figure the Douglas Sirk essay';[19] and similarly one could argue that German film history more generally constitutes a notable structural absence, at least in Fassbinder's public pronouncements on his aesthetic influences.

If there are few direct comments by Fassbinder on German film history, its influence, and references to it, are nevertheless clearly discernible in many of his films. In some cases these references are explicit and didactic, in others they represent a return of the repressed, as much erupting from the diffuse screen memories and preferences of the film fan Fassbinder as constituting a conscious attempt by the Brechtian auteur Fassbinder to deconstruct the ideologies of popular culture. Perhaps the most obvious examples are *Lili Marleen* (1980) and *Die Sehnsucht der Veronika Voss/Veronika Voss* (1982), which, apart from any other thematic concerns they may have, are fictionalized studies of actual German entertainers and actresses Lale Andersen and Sybille Schmitz respectively. Kuzniar, meanwhile, has identified the influence not only of Sierck's Ufa aesthetic, but more specifically how the star image of Zarah Leander (her original glamour refracted through

14 Töteberg, *Rainer Werner Fassbinder*, p. 24.

15 Reported in Harry Baer, *Schlafen kann ich, wenn ich tot bin. Das atemlose Leben des Rainer Werner Fassbinder* (Cologne: Kiepenhauer & Witsch, 1982), p. 195.

16 Alice Kuzniar, *The Queer German Cinema* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 69.

17 Fassbinder's idolization of Sirk and the latter's connection to the Nazi industry has been analyzed by some as reflecting back on Fassbinder's own politics. See, for example, Gertrud Koch, 'Torments of the flesh, coldness of the spirit: Jewish figures in the films of Rainer Werner Fassbinder', *New German Critique*, no. 38 (Spring/Summer 1986), pp. 28–38.

18 See, for example, Gertrud Koch, 'Von Detlef Sierck zu Douglas Sirk', *Frauen und Film*, nos 44–45 (1988), pp. 109–29.

19 Kuzniar, *The Queer German Cinema*, p. 70.

the later appropriation of her by gay men and drag queens) pervades, 'as the unstated model – a ghost – behind the main characters', films as diverse as *In einem Jahr mit dreizehn Monden/In A Year With Thirteen Moons* (1978), *Lili Marleen*, *Veronika Voss* and *Querelle*.[20]

20 Ibid.

Apart from the strategies of quotation and impersonation, perhaps the most significant device in Fassbinder's films to comment on the history of German cinema is the casting of actors and performers from different periods of German film history. While the systematic reliance on actors from the 1930s and 1940s such as Luise Ulrich and Brigitte Mira, or Barbara Valentin, Karlheinz Böhm, Mario Adorf, Karin Baal and Ivan Desny from the 1950s and 1960s, has been noted before, what has been recognized less often (particularly by critics unfamiliar with the career trajectories of these performers) is that the casting of these figures, and especially the relation between film role and established screen persona, provided Fassbinder on the one hand with a 'tradition', but also gave him the opportunity to reimagine and reconstruct this same tradition.

What is striking about many of these 'veterans', and what presumably made them interesting to Fassbinder, is that while they may have been associated with what is generally referred to as 'mainstream' cinema, they were decidedly not mainstream performers. Many of them had a liminal quality to them, either in the type of roles that they were assigned in German films, or in their biographies, which often include discrepancies, interruptions, failures and redirections, long before Fassbinder imposed a further reorientation on them.[21] Thus, there is the operetta and musical comedy actress Brigitte Mira (the downtrodden cleaner in *Angst essen Seele auf/Fear Eats the Soul* [1973]), who despite a Jewish background incongruously began her career in Nazi cinema, and who simply goes on performing – her unbroken determination to survive and to be liked poignantly evident in all of her roles. Karlheinz Böhm, on the other hand, represents the reluctant star, seeking to undercut the fame he found as the archetypal screen monarch in the romantic *Sissi* film series by playing the voyeuristic serial killer in *Peeping Tom* (1960), then portraying ice-cold sadists for Fassbinder (notably in *Martha* [1974]), and then retiring from acting altogether and becoming a media saint through his charity work in Africa. Then there is the suave and perennially melancholy Peking-born and French-educated Ivan Desny, son of Russian exiles, providing a palpable sense of authenticity to his role as the returning emigre Oswald in *Die Ehe der Maria Braun/The Marriage of Maria Braun* (1978). Karin Baal and Barbara Valentin, provocative and dangerous sex symbols of the mid 1950s and early 1960s respectively, reappear in Fassbinder's films, recycled even after their careers seem to have run full-circle.

21 The same is true for the international stars in Fassbinder's films: one thinks of Eddie Constantine in *Warnung vor einer heiligen Nutte* (1971), Anna Karina in *Chinesisches Roulette* (1976), Dirk Bogarde and Andréa Ferréol in *Despair* (1977) or Jeanne Moreau and Franco Nero in *Querelle* (1982).

There is an at times uncomfortably disturbing realism in the way Fassbinder presents figures such as Baal and Valentin, as their faces, still rebellious and beautiful, reflect what has happened to their careers

and lives. Fassbinder's use of such actors may be knowing and self-reflexive, but it would be wrong to see this strategy simply as a camp gesture or as postmodern irony. The appearance of icons such as Mira always suggests a reciprocal need between director and performer rather than one-sided exploitation; Fassbinder largely refrained from turning established actors into *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* grotesques. Despite the cruelty that Fassbinder reportedly inflicted on his performers during filming, his onscreen presentation of these veteran performers seems marked by affection and respect for their history, professionalism and personal integrity, even, indeed especially, of those whose previous film experience was as far removed from the high cultural aspirations of the New German Cinema as one could imagine, such as former B-movie starlet Valentin. However, beyond the individual qualities that actors such as Mira, Valentin and Desny contributed to the Fassbinder universe, they also imparted a collective dimension.

In one sense, there is a utopian element to the constellation of the typical Fassbinder ensemble, which combines different performance registers, different generic and biographical backgrounds and different generations in an attempt to provide a compendium of filmic traditions, allowing the discontinuities and differences of German cinema to exist side by side in equilibrium, albeit a fragile one. One could argue that this virtual commentary on German film history runs parallel, or as a subtext, to the more general national history that Fassbinder aimed to document through his films. In a second sense, what the diversity of performance styles of Fassbinder's veterans does is to provide an effective rejection of the impression of 'Daddy's Cinema' as the bland and worthless cultural mode that the Oberhauseners caricatured in their pronouncements. Simply speaking, if the stereotypical view of the cinema of the late 1940s and 1950s as an inconsequential 'Bavarian cottage industry' was correct, there could not have existed actors of the kind that Fassbinder 'discovered' in the early 1970s.

I am drawing here in particular on a line of argument proposed in recent revisionist accounts, which challenges the long-held view, informed largely by Theodor Adorno's and Max Horkheimer's conceptualization of the culture industry, of 1950s West German cinema as politically and aesthetically regressive, and which instead perceives the turn in postwar West Germany away from high cultural and 'art cinema' modes towards popular genres as an expression of the country's (albeit ambivalent and gradual) democratization process, and as a marker of the period's ideological contradictions.[22] This repositioning in turn opens up the opportunity for the rediscovery of a lost history, of lost influences, and of hidden continuities and differences between the decades. In the spirit of this project, for the remainder of this essay my aim is to contrast the genre of 1950s West German *Problemfilme* with what I will identify as Fassbinder's continuation and reinterpretation of the same generic corpus – this

22 See, for example, Heide Fehrenbach, *Cinema in Democratizing Germany: Reconstructing National Identity after Hitler* (Chapel Hill, NC and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Erica Carter, *How German is She? Postwar West German Reconstruction and the Consuming Woman* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

comparison will centre primarily on *Lola* (1981) and Rolf Thiele's *Das Mädchen Rosemarie/The Girl Rosemarie* (1958).

Part of Fassbinder's BRD trilogy (which also comprises *The Marriage of Maria Braun* and *Veronika Voss*), *Lola* has had a mixed reception, and is probably the least studied critically of the three. Moreover, apart from its setting in the 1950s (which all three films share), *Lola* stands out from its companion films in terms of genre, style and mood. *Maria Braun* and *Veronika Voss* are exemplary case studies for Fassbinder's use of melodramatic conventions, and function as melodrama themselves. *Lola*, which chronicles the gradual corruption of an uptight municipal building inspector (Armin Mueller-Stahl) by a local business tycoon with the aid of the town's most sought-after callgirl, also uses melodramatic conventions, but works primarily as a hybrid of black comedy, farce and satire. While the former films end with the death of their main female protagonists, and are infused with a fatalistic mood of foreboding and gloom, the eponymous protagonist of *Lola* (played by Barbara Sukowa) not only survives, but triumphantly achieves her social aspirations by the time of the supremely ironic 'happy ending' – her marriage to the building inspector confers respectability, while her sexual and financial arrangements with her former client, the business tycoon, continue. Despite this irony, Elsaesser has argued that

> *Lola* is finally a surprisingly optimistic film, tender to its characters and to that extent directed towards their future, without sacrificing its sharply targeted project of being an image of a past period and its mores.[23]

23 Elsaesser, *Fassbinder's Germany*, p. 127.

In terms of rhythm, too, *Lola* differs from the other films in the trilogy: the film's narrative flow seems to be marked to a greater degree by

Ensemble acting in *Lola* (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1981). Picture courtesy: BFI Collections.

manic restlessness and frantic energy, heightened by the abrupt editing techniques.

Overall, then, *Lola* is not a critique of the greed and corruption of West German society of the 1950s, but a gleeful, almost Sadean, celebration of the total corruptibility and amorality of its characters, whose 'vitality' Fassbinder explicitly admired.[24] At the same time, as Elsaesser's quote above indicates, the film shows a more compassionate investment in its characters, and lacks the misogyny that pervades some of Fassbinder's other films which have a more melodramatic narrative trajectory. *Lola*'s anomalous position within the context of the BRD trilogy could be explained by the fact that the film is not based on an original story, but is (or at least claims to be) a quasi-remake of Josef von Sternberg's 1930 Weimar classic *Der blaue Engel/The Blue Angel* (with Fassbinder using that film's central character's name as the title for his), and thus also an adaptation of Heinrich Mann's satirical novel *Professor Unrat*. It is notable, however, that despite Fassbinder's own insistence on this legacy, most commentators have discounted this connection as something of a red herring because, at closer inspection, *Lola* has relatively little in common with either source beyond a few superficial similarities to their respective narratives. If one wished to invoke a comparison with Weimar cinema, *Lola*'s Sadean philosophy and sarcasm is at any rate closer to G.W. Pabst's films with Louise Brooks than to *Blue Angel*.

Another interesting intertextual connection, however, is raised in an early 1980s review of *Lola*, even if the reference in this case is clearly meant to discredit Fassbinder's effort:

> I was reminded less of Marlene Dietrich's Lola in *The Blue Angel*, and more of Nadja Tiller's *Girl Rosemarie*. [Fassbinder] gets carried away by his unreflected nostalgia for a stolid decade – what little criticism remains is sugarcoated.[25]

This reference to Thiele's *The Girl Rosemarie* is suggestive for a number of reasons. Like *Lola*, Thiele's film was conceived as a satire of the West German *Wirtschaftswunder* (the economic miracle) period of the 1950s, and had a socially aspirant prostitute if not actually as its 'heroine' then as its central narrative catalyst. *Rosemarie* was a *succès de scandale* in the late 1950s, causing controversy and encountering censorship threats, but was also one of West German cinema's few respectable export successes at the time.[26] The film chronicled the real-life rise and eventual murder of the Frankfurt callgirl Rosemarie Nitribitt (played by Nadja Tiller), the killing rumoured to have been instigated by her influential clientele, which allegedly comprised Frankfurt's regional politicians, bankers and industrial magnates.[27] The fact that Nitribitt's murder was never officially solved (one suspect was eventually tried, but later acquitted) only heightened suspicions of an official cover-up. Moreover, the scandal has never fully gone away. At periodic intervals since the late 1950s there have been new, albeit

24 Töteberg, *Rainer Werner Fassbinder*, p. 123.

25 Bernd Lubowski, 'Kontra: *Lola*', *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 21 August 1981.

26 For an analysis of the British reception at the time, see Joachim Lembach, *The Standing of the German Cinema in Great Britain after 1945* (Lewiston, NY, Queenston and Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), pp. 212–14.

27 For a comprehensive analysis of both the original scandal and the film, see Marli Feldvoß, 'Wer hat Angst vor Rosemarie Nitribitt?

Eine Chronik mit Mord, Sitte und Kunst aus den fünfziger Jahren', in Jürgen Berger, Hans-Peter Reichmann and Rudolf Worschech (eds), *Zwischen Gestern und Morgen: Westdeutscher Nachkriegsfilm 1946–1962* (Frankfurt am Main: Deutsches Filmmuseum, 1989), pp. 164–82.

inconclusive, revelations in the press and on television, while amateur sleuths keep the memory of the case alive on various websites. A rather vacuous remake of Thiele's film was directed by Bernd Eichinger in 1996, while a more serious investigation of the real Nitribitt's background, which also for the first time revealed the involvement of the Krupp dynasty in the affair, was provided by the recent television documentary *Rosemarie Nitribitt – Tod einer Hure/Rosemarie Nitribitt – Death Of A Prostitute* (2000).

One could argue that the Nitribitt scandal was one of the first incidents in the history of the new West German Republic which made visible the underside of postwar reconstruction; it dampened the euphoria and exposed the illusions (or pretensions) of innocence that had accompanied this process up to this point. Moreover, Nitribitt and her fate represented the unacceptable side to the social and gender mobility that the *Wirtschaftswunder* had inaugurated, exemplified by Nitribitt's conspicuous consumption and emblematized in her customised Mercedes Benz convertible, which was fetishistically featured in all the tabloid reports about her. Nitribitt had transgressed the implicit social and gender norms of the time not only by being a prostitute, and by being publicly visible as such, but also by breaking the rules of 'rational consumption' expected in the 1950s of West Germans in general, and of women in particular.[28] This in turn raised deep anxieties about 'the disappearance of all distinctions between the respectable middle-class woman and the emancipated woman with her own needs and ambitions'.[29]

28 For an analysis of the 1950s consuming woman, see Carter, *How German is She?*

29 Sabine Hake, *German National Cinema* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2002), p. 109.

While Fassbinder never claimed to be influenced by it in any specific way, both the original scandal of Nitribitt's murder and Thiele's film have undoubtedly left their marks on *Lola*. A clear reference to the iconography of the real Nitribitt can be found in the scene in which

Conspicuous consumption: Nadja Tiller in *Das Mädchen Rosemarie* (Rolf Thiele, 1958). Picture courtesy: BFI Collections.

Lola makes her spectacular entrance in her convertible at the public ceremony in the town square, designed to impress the inspector. The fact that Fassbinder transforms the schoolteacher of *Professor Unrat* and *Blue Angel* into a municipal inspector, whose function is to monitor urban development and the approval of building contracts, is also significant in this respect. Not only does this altering of the main character's profession give Fassbinder an opportunity to comment directly on the *Zeitgeist* of the Federal Republic's reconstruction period, it also connects with Fassbinder's interest in the moral, psychological and social implications of postwar urban capitalism, the after-effects of which Fassbinder experienced in the 1970s in Frankfurt, and which eventually were worked through in his most controversial play *Der Müll, die Stadt und der Tod* (*Garbage, the City and Death*) and, more tangentially, in the film *In A Year With Thirteen Moons*. The Nitribitt scandal was part of the urban history, symbolism and mythology on which Fassbinder drew, both in his conception of the 1950s and in his perspective on Frankfurt. Thus, it does not seem to be a coincidence that *Garbage* also features as one of its central characters a prostitute who gets killed, destroyed by the machinations of local business interests and political intrigue.

That *Rosemarie* (the film) was a model of sorts for *Lola* is further suggested by the fact that two of the former's cast reappear in the latter, and in central parts: Karin Baal, who portrayed a young prostitute in Thiele's film (in the final frames of the film she takes over from the murdered Rosemarie, ensuring that business continues as usual), plays Lola's mother and Mueller-Stahl's housekeeper, while Mario Adorf, who is a pimp in *Rosemarie*, is cast as Schuckert, the charmingly vulgar and perpetually jovial villain, in Fassbinder's film. Comparing these actors' roles in the two films, in the sense of those subtextual film historical commentaries and trajectories underlying Fassbinder's films that I referred to above, one can easily conceive of them as younger and older versions of the same personae. This is especially true in Adorf's case, where, in an imaginary chronology, Thiele's small-time rogue has made it big in Fassbinder's film, now financially controlling the whole town, including the local brothel, out of which he seems to operate. In *Rosemarie*, Adorf's character occupies a dual function, as a member of Frankfurt's red light district underworld and as part of a comedic double act of street balladeers who comment on the film's narrative as a kind of Greek chorus. In *Lola* these functions have merged, as Adorf's performance style, clearly modelled on the conventions of a theatrical farce, is so exaggerated that it seems to border on self-parody.

Baal's performance in *Lola*, by contrast, is more subtle and understated. Throughout the film, her character, Frau Kummer, acts as the 'sensible' observer, as a facilitator of Mueller-Stahl's character transformation (she advises him on which suits to wear), and as a moral counterpoint to her daugher's sexual transgressions and social

ambitions. That her projected moral integrity, like that of the other citizens, may be no more than a facade, is suggested in a scene in which Frau Kummer shows Lola around the house and refers to some of the other tenants, who include a black American GI and an old man. Kummer refers to the former in a mixture of obsequiousness and suppressed racism ('the Negro once occupied the whole house'), while she reveals the latter, in a conspiratorial tone, to be working in the town square as a blind beggar despite the fact that he is not blind. At this revelation, Kummer starts to giggle approvingly and Lola joins in the laughter in what turns into one of the film's few genuine bonding moments between mother and daughter. While on one level this scene helps to break down the moral opposition the film up to that point has created between Kummer and her daughter, and even raises the possibility that Kummer may have had a past not dissimilar to her daughter's present, on another level what surfaces in this scene is a glimpse of the confidently amoral Lolita-figure Baal once portrayed in the West German cinema of the mid to late 1950s in films such as *Rosemarie* or Georg Tressler's 'troubled youth' melodrama *Die Halbstarken/The Hooligans* (1956).

Beyond these personal references and continuities, there are a number of other remarkable similarities between the two films. Like *Rosemarie*, Fassbinder's film was accused by some at the time of its release of being compromised and consumed by the historical subject it intended to critique, or alternatively of being too cerebral and emotionally detached.[30] Crucially, the reasons given for this perceived 'failure' have in both cases centred on the films' aesthetic strategies, and in particular on their rejection of a realist paradigm in telling their stories. This has led to a disjuncture between critical expectations of historically specific representational norms in depicting 'reality', and the films' distanciation techniques, even if, as I will argue below, these techniques serve quite different ideological and aesthetic functions in the two films.

In *Lola*, Fassbinder adopted a systematic colour dramaturgy that he would develop to extremes in his last film *Querelle*, a primary, symbolic and almost abstract use of colour that owes a lot to the antinaturalist employment of Technicolor or Eastmancolor in the 1950s Hollywood melodramas of Sirk, Joseph L. Mankiewicz, and Nicholas Ray (which Fassbinder's cinematographer Xaver Schwarzenberger was reportedly told to study in preparation for *Lola*).[31] There are further narrative references to this type of cinema, as, for example, in the scene where Mueller-Stahl's loneliness is visualized through the image of him sitting isolated in front of the television, an obvious quotation from Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows* (1954). Colour coding in *Lola* is thus used on one level to impart the impression of the historical context of the 1950s through its characteristic shades and tones (such as the fluorescent blues and pastel pinks); on another level the film inaugurates the style and trends of the early to mid 1980s, represented

30 See Heinz B. Heller, 'Femme Fatale und Hure: von *Lulu* zum *Mädchen Rosemarie*', in Thomas Koebner (ed.), *Idole des deutschen Films* (Munich: Edition text+kritik, 1997), p. 149.

31 Töteberg, *Rainer Werner Fassbinder*, p. 124.

by, for example, 1950s retro fashions and the emerging aesthetic of the promotional music video, both of which *Lola* anticipates. Even in the outdoor photography, Schwarzenberger employs neon-like tonalities, as if to refuse even 'real' locations (as opposed to studio interiors) the impression of being 'natural'.

Within the context of Fassbinder's aesthetics, then, the colours in *Lola* literally have a history. At a more specific narrative level the colours function to differentiate characters (or better types) and externalize interior emotions and feelings. Thus, the luminous blue that envelops the inspector played by Armin Mueller-Stahl may be interpreted both as articulating the character's 'blue-eyed' naivety, as well as indicating his initial emotional coldness. Pinks and reds of a gift-wrap variety, on the other hand, predominate in the brothel scenes and especially characterize the depiction of Lola. When Lola, however, has a first glimpse of Mueller-Stahl's bedroom, the scene dissolves in a lilac haze, which blends the reds and blues and thus anticipates her marriage to him.

A similar function is occupied by the many popular 1950s songs on the film's soundtrack which act as a kind of aural collage, aiming less to provide an authentic musical background than to capture the decade's aspirations, fantasies and emotions. Thus Fassbinder and his composer Peer Raben chose particularly evocative songs: 'Fährt ein weisses Schiff nach Hong-Kong' ('A White Ship Sails for Hong Kong'), sung by 1950s pop icon Freddy Quinn over the opening credits, and 'Capri-Fischer', which articulate both an escapist desire to be 'somewhere else' (and thus to shed one's national identity) and a promise of the possible, if temporary, realization of that desire through the emerging service industry of mass tourism; or 'Am Tag, als der Regen kam' ('The Day the Rains Came'), which encapsulates in its lyrics and in its compositional style the kind of hysteria, feverish yearning, delayed or suspended gratification of desire, and operatic excess that Fassbinder valued in visual terms in Sirk's Hollywood work. [32] Other auteurs (Alexander Kluge or Dennis Potter spring to mind) have often used the device of popular songs from the past intruding on the present as memory in order to point up the false consciousness of such popular expressions. By contrast, Fassbinder's use of these songs, though also acknowledging their falseness, retains the forceful emotional energy that they originally projected, so much so that they seem to be among the few genuine forms of emotional expression within the film's aesthetic dynamic.

This tautology, that only the false and the artificial can be used to reflect the genuine and real, is of course a cornerstone of Fassbinder's antirealist aesthetics more generally, but it has also often been the reason for a profound misunderstanding between Fassbinder and his critics, particularly in Germany. Thus, at the time of *Lola*'s original release, even reviewers sympathetic to the film felt it necessary to downplay, or laugh off as quirky irrelevance, the film's 'artificiality',

32 *Am Tag als der Regen kam* is also a 1959 film directed by Gerd Oswald and starring Mario Adorf.

'lack of authenticity', and 'bad taste' or 'kitsch' (particularly its garish colours, and the retro production design).[33] In negative reviews these characteristics represented what was wrong with the film. The film's aesthetic strategy clearly offended the norms of appropriate or pleasurable forms of representation for some critics: 'toxically discoloured sets' are noted with perceptible disgust, while the musical interludes of popular 1950s songs simply 'drown out the narrative development', an aesthetic device which amounts to a 'contempt for the audience'.[34] In another review, equally irritated by Fassbinder's eclectic collage of 1950s references, the critic sees nothing but an indigestible concoction of 'cliches, triviality, [and] pathetic-kitschy dialogues'.[35]

Although the addressee of these criticisms appears to be Fassbinder as auteur, what is actually at stake in these reviews (even the positive ones), and what becomes manifest in the above quoted reference to *Rosemarie*, is *Lola*'s implication in wider debates about the distinctions between 'high' and 'low' in German culture, and more specifically, the film's relation to, and adoption of, the aesthetic paradigms of the 1950s. In other words, what these contemporary reviews articulate with almost hysterical hyperbole in their expressed revulsion is the extent to which the aesthetic and cultural legacy of the 1950s, including the cinema of the period, was pathologized and repressed in West Germany during the 1970s and early 1980s. Moreover, this repression operated not only at the academic-critical level, but it also represented, considering the circulation of the papers in which the above reviews appeared, wider public opinion, or perhaps rather more specifically that of the educated middle class, West Germany's influential *Bildungsbürgertum*. As suggested earlier, this repression would, shortly after *Lola*, turn into its direct opposite, with a celebratory and nostalgic revival of the 1950s taking place from the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s. While this shift in cultural reactions to, and perceptions of, the 1950s is worthy of study in its own right, what interests me here are the underlying differences and similarities in generic definitions and cultural hierarchies between the 1950s and the 1970s, which of course not only informed the above reception, and which from an orthodox auteurist position one may term a 'misreading' of *Lola*'s and Fassbinder's intentions, but which also determined the latter's and, as far as *Rosemarie* is concerned, Thiele's aesthetic approaches in the first place.

Like *Lola*, Thiele's film is a complex generic hybrid that deliberately employs strategies of distanciation and artificiality. Irrespective of its intentions, however, at the time and subsequently,[36] *Rosemarie* was understood primarily as a *Problemfilm*, a genre that may usefully be compared with the contemporaneous concept in the USA of the 'adult' film. The latter category included the Sirkian melodramas that Fassbinder so admired, and which Barbara Klinger has defined as responding to 'increasing trends toward sexually explicit

33 See, for example, Hellmuth Karasek, 'Der blauäugige Engel', *Der Spiegel*, 24 August 1981, p. 170.

34 All quotes from: Karena Niehoff, 'Graues, grell gestrichen', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 22 August 1981.

35 Lubowski, 'Kontra: *Lola*'.

36 See Claudius Seidl, *Der deutsche Film der fünfziger Jahre* (Munich: Heyne, 1987), pp. 198–201.

representations in the media', while at the same time conceiving of 'melodramatic style as a veritable wonderland of consumer fantasies and goods to appeal to the post-World War II affluent mentality'.[37] Klinger goes on to argue that Hollywood's 'industry typically defined the adult film through a double language that emphasized its social significance to justify titillating indulgence in the spectacles provided by psychological torment, drugs, sex and murder'.[38] Certainly a similar strategy can be detected in the rationale behind the emergence of the West German *Problemfilm* of the same period, which tackled such controversial social issues as prostitution (*Die Sünderin/The Sinner* [1951] and *Rosemarie*), ethnic difference (*Toxi* [1952]), drug dealing (*Die goldene Pest/The Golden Plague* [1954]), adultery and illegitimate pregnancy (*Liebe ohne Illusion/Love without Illusion* [1955]), the East–West conflict (*Himmel ohne Sterne/Heaven without Stars* [1955]), juvenile delinquency (*Die Halbstarken/The Hooligans* [1956]), homosexuality (*Anders als du und ich/Different from You and Me* [1957]) and rape (*Stadt ohne Mitleid/Town without Pity* [1959]).

Another subset of the West German *Problemfilm* of the 1950s could be constructed around the topos of the corrupt community that in traumatic encounters with the outsider (for example the occupation forces, returning emigres, or refugees from Germany's lost provinces such as Eastern Prussia, Pommerania and Silesia) closes in on itself in spasms of guilt and paranoia. Here *Rosemarie* sits side by side with films such as *The Golden Plague*, *Town without Pity*, *Es geschah am hellichten Tag/It Happened in Broad Daylight* (1958) and *Kirmes/Carnival* (1960), as well as more highbrow cultural texts of the time such as Friedrich Dürrenmatt's play *Der Besuch der alten Dame/The Visit* (1956). More than twenty years later, Fassbinder drew on this generic and narrative tradition in several ways. Not only does *Lola* echo the *Problemfilm*'s topos of the corrupt community as a metaphor for the wider national body, its narrative also reworks the motif of Eastern refugees through the character of Frau Kummer (who originally comes from East Prussia) and through the municipal inspector's nostalgic affection for East Prussian dialect and culture. The latter is given a further twist through the casting of Mueller-Stahl, a former East German film star who had left the GDR not long before *Lola* was made. Indeed Fassbinder's film was one of Mueller-Stahl's first major screen roles in the West.[39]

To argue, as much of the previous writing on the *Problemfilme* of the 1950s has done,[40] that the genre 'failed' to resolve its chosen problems or that it provided 'hypocritical' or 'pseudo-realist' answers to 'real' issues, however, misses the point of the films' function at the time. Irmbert Schenk has argued that a schematic periodization of West German history in the 1950s between initial repression, restoration and fossilization, and subsequent liberalization and modernization, ignores the actual parallel and simultaneous nature of such developments.[41] This applies equally to the West German *Problemfilm*, which

37 Barbara Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 37.

38 Ibid.

39 See Claudia Fellmer, 'Armin Mueller-Stahl: from East Germany to the West Coast', in Bergfelder, Carter and Göktürk (eds), *The German Cinema Book*, pp. 90–97.

40 Typical in this respect is Seidl's assessment in *Der deutsche Film der fünfziger Jahre*, p. 177.

41 See Irmbert Schenk, '"Derealisierung" oder "aufregende Modernisierung": Film und Kino der 50er Jahre in der Bundesrepublik', in Schenk (ed.), *Erlebnisort Kino* (Marburg: Schüren, 2000), pp. 113–14.

articulates social and individual choices in a contradictory, dialogic way. As Carter suggests in respect of one of the *Problemfilm*'s subgenres, the domestic melodrama:

> What is thus at stake in the films' oscillation between excess and stability is not a disruption of established bourgeois order, but, rather, an exploration of the contradictions between two conflicting bourgeois models: the model of bourgeois family order pitched against postwar visions of mass participation in bourgeois affluence.[42]

42 Carter, *How German Is She?*, p. 182.

Discussing the *Problemfilm* as a whole, one could argue that the genre's primary function may have been to provide a discursive framework or forum for airing certain social problems, the existence of which alone represented, and moreover proclaimed, both to itself and to the outside world, the Federal Republic's still uncertain democratic legitimation. The turn to, and valorization of, popular culture in the 1950s, and the concomitant rejection of a high culture perceived to be 'elitist', which subsequent generations of critics have identified as expressing the era's inherent conservatism and philistinism, needs to be understood in the context of this democratization process too. Thus, rather than seeing the dominance of popular genres in the 1950s as an exclusively regressive phenomenon, it is equally possible to perceive it as part of an ambivalent process of modernization, and as facilitating a more egalitarian (if also capitalist) mode of cultural consumption.[43] It is this euphoric embrace of consumerism, of course, that in *Lola* marks the characters' previously alluded-to vitality. In this respect, it is of course important to remember that the *Problemfilm*, and cinema more generally, promoted the achievements of the *Wirtschaftswunder* both visually (through its display of consumer goods) and narratively (through ideological discourse). However, cinema also simultaneously represented a consumer product, social space and leisure activity, a major symbol for the achievements of the new West German society, especially if one considers the way the medium had been functionalized as a public sphere during the Third Reich.

43 See Schenk, '"Derealisierung" oder "aufregende Modernisierung"'.

While a number of characteristics of the *Problemfilm* could equally apply with modification to similar genres elsewhere (such as the 'adult' film in Hollywood), there are some elements that are particular to the German context. For example, unlike the contemporaneous films by Sirk et al., the majority of the West German *Problemfilme* were shot, as much out of economic necessity as for aesthetic reasons, in black and white. Moreover, they frequently lack the specific emphasis on mise-en-scene that has been identified as a crucial element in Hollywood melodrama.[44] Discussing a series of 1950s West German domestic melodramas, which centre on the figure of the consuming woman, Carter has suggested that in these films an excessive employment of visual style and sound is displaced onto an excessive representation of character:

44 See, for example, Thomas Elsaesser, 'Tales of sound and fury: observations on the family melodrama', in Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Home Is Where The Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), pp. 43–69.

> While excessive visual style can be read in classical melodrama as a 'symptom' of narrative anxiety, in these West German films the same function is performed by character stereotype. The power of the stereotype lies precisely in its capacity to accommodate that surplus of affective energy that realist representation or social experience cannot contain.[45]

45 Carter, *How German Is She?*, p. 195.

Although Carter does not explicitly refer to *Rosemarie*, the above quote provides a useful starting point in exploring the film's narrative strategies. Firstly, *Rosemarie*, which is not just a *Problemfilm*, but also understands itself as a satire, certainly does foreground its visual, narrative and aural strategies. Moreover, these are excessive in comparison with the domestic melodramas Carter discusses, and indeed earned director Thiele the reputation of being a mannerist.[46] Visually, the film frequently relies on *tableau*-like stagings, and liberally uses zooms and wipes (notably similar to the ones employed in *Lola*), as well as visual gags such as a recurring image of a revolving hotel door, the sinister yet comical synchronization of Nitribitt's clients as a choreographed ensemble, or the re-enactment (albeit clothed) by Nadja Tiller of Edouard Manet's painting *Olympia*.

46 Lothar Hack, 'Soziologische Bemerkungen zum deutschen Gegenwartsfilm', in Wilfried von Bredow and Rolf Zurek (eds), *Film und Gesellschaft in Deutschland. Dokumente und Materialien* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1975), p. 370.

Narratively, the film's classical structure is disrupted both by chronological jumps and, as mentioned previously, through the device of having two street balladeers stepping out of the diegesis and in Brechtian manner commenting on the developments through musical cabaret interludes. Moreover, even within the diegesis itself, several of the actors perform in a highly self-conscious, parodying manner, as if to underline that they are not meant to be read as psychologically rounded characters but as caricatures. The film's score (composed by Norbert Schultze of 'Lili Marleen' fame – another link to Fassbinder) also has a distanciating effect – apart from the cabaret songs (deliberate Weill pastiches) performed by the two street balladeers, the soundtrack mainly relies on obtrusive sound effects, which resemble in equal amounts atonal modernist compositions and the accompaniments to silent slapstick comedies. The references in their systematic association with high culture (Manet, Brecht/Weill, experimental music, and so on) are clearly designed to give the film a veneer of cultural legitimacy.

This, then, despite the two films' previously argued similarities, appears to be exactly the opposite aesthetic strategy from the one employed by *Lola*, with its references to 1950s Hollywood melodrama and popular song. Whereas *Rosemarie* uses the conventions of satire, political cabaret and high culture to tell the inherent melodrama of Nitribitt's story, and simultaneously to disguise its own implications in the populist conventions of the *Problemfilm*, *Lola* uses melodrama and the affective potential of popular culture quite openly to arrive at satire. However, as in the case of *Lola*, it was (and is) *Rosemarie*'s ambiguous placement between the genres, and between 'high' and 'low' culture,

that determined the film's contradictory reception. Critical evaluations of Thiele's film divide into a number of distinctive opinions.

First, there were those civil servants and politicians at the time who perceived the film to constitute a danger to the Federal Republic's reputation, who made every effort to stop the film from being shown abroad, and who unwittingly thereby gave the film the publicity it needed to become a box-office hit.[47] In this instance of reception, then, the film's distanciation strategies were discounted and *Rosemarie* was read either as a realist, semi-documentary expose (which would harm the Federal Republic's reputation through its insinuations of 'real' corruption, crime and moral decadence) or as a mixture of unwanted political polemic and melodramatic exploitation (which, in addition to the above insinuations, would undermine the country's international reputation). Indeed, in defence of the film in the latter respect, many reviews at the time felt it necessary to distance it from the lower strata of melodrama production.[48] Particular praise in these reviews is reserved for Nadja Tiller's aloof, emotionally restrained interpretation of Nitribitt, interestingly precisely because the performance eschews qualities which one might normally associate with a prostitute (most notably the markers of social deprivation), and more generally because it lacks excess (vulgarity).

An alternative perspective on the film, one of the most prominent early manifestations of which was Enno Patalas's review in *Filmkritik*,[49] and one to which most subsequent critics of the film have subscribed, locates the film's failure primarily in its lack of affective qualities, which is seen to be caused by the generic framework of the satire,[50] and secondly, by Thiele's mannerist style, which Patalas criticized in the film's 'tendency towards abstraction'.[51] From this perspective, Tiller's performance, and the manifest social and behavioural mismatch between actress, character and real-life model, becomes one of the film's representational problems.

What *Rosemarie*'s aesthetic strategies and the film's contradictory reception ultimately document are competing discourses which remain unresolved. One of the phrases that was frequently used in reviews of the film was that it represented a 'failed opportunity'. If one accepts this assessment (and perhaps even might suggest *Lola* as a late fulfilment of *Rosemarie*'s promise) the question remains how in the late 1950s the story of Rosemarie Nitribitt *could* have been filmed differently, in a way that was both *possible* within the cultural parameters available at the time, and *effective* in representing the case's underlying issues. Via the circuitous route of Fassbinder's reading of 1950s melodrama as the falsity that comments on the real, this may bring us back to the kind of cinema that both these forms of reception repress.

Under the rubric of one of the *Problemfilm*'s most disreputable subgenres, the *Sittenfilm* (vice film), one year after Thiele's *Rosemarie* another film about the Nitribitt scandal appeared, directed by Rudolf

47 The process is documented in Feldvoß, 'Wer hat Angst vor Rosemarie Nitribitt?'.

48 See, for example, Karena Niehoff, 'Satire im Niemandsland', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 3 September 1958; Friedrich Luft, 'Das Mädchen Rosemarie', *Die Welt*, 26 August 1958.

49 Enno Patalas, 'Das Mädchen Rosemarie', *Filmkritik*, vol. 2, no. 10 (1958), p. 218.

50 'Sittenknüller auf Zelluloid', *Nürnberger Zeitung*, 30 August 1958.

51 Patalas, 'Das Mädchen Rosemarie', p. 218.

Jugert, *Die Wahrheit über Rosemarie/The Truth About Rosemarie* (although it is the distribution title of the US video and DVD version – *She Walks By Night* – that perhaps conveys better what kind of film this is). Jugert's film is likely to have been seen as conforming to the disreputable generic conventions that Thiele's film was commended for avoiding. Eschewing any attempt at distanciation, satirical or otherwise, and lacking any references to classical paintings or Brecht, *The Truth About Rosemarie* instead embraces the melodramatic register wholeheartedly, especially in its sensationalist title, which promises a truth it cannot deliver, in its quasi-expressionist urban mise-en-scene (the cinematography is by Georg Krause, who shot Kubrick's *Paths of Glory*), and in a far from restrained central performance from British actress and former Rank starlet Belinda Lee. Jugert's film may lack the bourgeois respectability and artistic ambition of Thiele's, but it provides precisely the 'authentic' seediness and the narrative and stylistic hysteria required to capture adequately the impact that the original Nitribitt scandal must have exerted. The film is also much more amenable to the kind of reading that Sirk's and other Hollywood melodramas of the 1950s have invited. However, the fact that it was Thiele's film, not Jugert's, that established itself as the 'classic' version of the story, indicates how much the former film's polysemy, or generic camouflage, may have helped its ultimate success in West Germany.

Looking back at both the late 1950s and the early 1980s from the vantage point of the early twenty-first century makes it easier to perceive the continuities between Fassbinder's *Lola* and Thiele's *Rosemarie* that I have attempted to trace in this essay, in terms of the films' generic and narrative strategies, in terms of personnel and performance traditions, and in terms of the discourses and debates the films provoked at the time of their release. My reason for charting the similarities and differences between the films, however, extends beyond simply uncovering a hitherto undocumented intertextual connection for *Lola*, or demonstrating a previously hidden sphere of influence on Fassbinder's oeuvre or auteurist worldview. More crucially, the two films emerge as exemplary case studies for continuities in German cinema in a more general sense, and for the discursive frameworks that have determined its evaluation. In this respect, what is of particular interest is the extent to which the films' respective critical receptions reveal a set of specific aesthetic norms prevalent at the time, which were closely connected to wider issues of national self-definition.

I have argued that in the 1950s the *Problemfilm* and other popular genres facilitated, but also regulated the boundaries and limitations of, the wider process of West Germany's cultural self-legitimation and democratization. The controversy caused by *Rosemarie* was due to no small extent to the film's inability to conform to a number of binary oppositions which structured aesthetic and ideological distinctions in West German public discourse at the time, most notably the

oppositions between 'high' and 'low' culture, between acceptable and unacceptable forms of consumerism, between social realism and popular entertainment, and between ideological criticism and the maintenance of national respectability. More than twenty years later, Fassbinder's *Lola* occupied a very similar position in not conforming to prevalent aesthetic and ideological hierarchies, even though the parameters of the national cinema had shifted significantly by this time.

From the early 1970s onwards, it was no longer the popular genres of the postwar West German industry which articulated and projected the country's cultural legitimation (both domestically and abroad), but the auteurist art film movement known collectively as the New German Cinema. On the whole, as argued previously, the New German cinema tried to cut its umbilical cord to the national cinema of the preceding decades, and in an Oedipal act rejected 'Daddy's cinema' of popular traditions and genres. This led to a different set of binary oppositions structuring the cultural hierarchies and preferences in the 1970s. Most notably, the decade saw a shift away from the promotion of bourgeois moral respectability as a marker of national self-definition, towards an affirmation of critical introspection as the preferred cultural expression of a new national ethics. At the same time, the New German cinema on the whole maintained and even reified on an aesthetic level the hierarchies and cultural distinctions of bourgeois notions of 'appropriate' art which had already been manifest in the 1950s, namely the championing of high culture over low, and of modes of realism (or alternatively non-narrative experimentation) over the conventions of popular generic traditions. In this context Fassbinder, although the most prolific, and internationally the best-known, protagonist of the New German cinema, constitutes a notable deviation from the norm, as his work, and particularly *Lola*, repeatedly straddled and transgressed the boundaries between high and low. It is no wonder that it is precisely this ambiguity in Fassbinder's films between art and popular culture that caused frictions in the German reception of his work, and *Lola*'s reviews amply demonstrate the difficulty viewers had at the time in reconciling the film's social critique with its visual and generic form, which were seen to be mutually incompatible. As the comparison with *Rosemarie* indicates, however, this particular dilemma of assessing the respective relationship between form and content has a long tradition in critical discourses on German cinema.

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'Too many kids and old ladies': quality demographics and 1960s US television

MARK ALVEY

It has become something of a historical truism that the US television industry, and consequently its programming, underwent significant changes in 1970. According to the standard account, after two decades of battling for the largest possible Nielsen audience, 'demographic thinking' suddenly took hold at the networks. Executives were paying attention to *who* was watching as well as *how many*. The quest for younger, more affluent viewers led to a 'purge' of CBS programmes dear to rural and older audiences, and sparked a trend towards 'quality' programming and more socially relevant themes. The story of this sea change in attitude rivals that of the quiz show scandals and the demise of live drama as a mythic benchmark in the annals of US television.

Les Brown's *Televi$ion: the Business Behind the Box* is the essential account of the 1970 shift.[1] Cited in virtually all subsequent chronicles of the period, Brown's book has been the primary force in determining the way the history has been presented, with its images of radical rethinking and sudden change inspired by the personal vision of a few executives. Sheer ratings success, reported Brown, 'was becoming irrelevant'. The television networks were 'suddenly ... on the make for the youth audience'. Leading the charge at NBC was the network's vice president of research Paul Klein, 'the apostle of the demographic approach', who saw it as his 'mission' to redefine the gauge of success in terms of audience composition rather than headcount. Likewise, according to Brown's account, the changes at CBS were largely the work of one man, network president Robert Wood, who

1 Les Brown, *Televi$ion: the Business Behind the Box* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971).

proposed in 1970 that the network 'de-ruralize' its schedule and 'begin to divest itself of the aging programs' like the Jackie Gleason and Red Skelton comedy–variety shows, which were deficient in attracting younger audiences, 'as but the first stage in a thorough re-ordering of program priorities leading to a rejuvenation of CBS'.[2] A year later Wood dumped all of his network's core rural-themed shows, such as *The Beverly Hillbillies* and *Mayberry RFD,* some of which were still drawing respectable Nielsen ratings.

Brown's book is an immensely valuable inside look at this particular moment in US television history, and makes no pretence of being anything more. But it has come to be taken as the accepted version of these events, and subsequent accounts have invoked its facts and repeated its inflections with no probing of historical context. Jane Feuer's introduction to her *MTM: Quality Television* contains a typical account: 'The crucial change that began to occur around 1970 was a de-emphasis on numbers and a greater emphasis on "demographics", i.e., directing television shows toward specific audience groups', whereas 'during the 1960s the emphasis in ratings was on numbers alone'.[3] Muriel Cantor provides a similar reading: 'Before 1970, the commercial value of a network television program was judged simply in terms of the percentage of households and the share a particular program attracted'.[4] In *Up the Tube*, Sally Bedell reports that 'network television roiled through a sea change in 1970', with the push for 'quality demographics' and 'relevant' programming.[5] Todd Gitlin's discussion of the events describes the changes at CBS as 'Bob Wood's great shift of 1970–71', and declares that 'his successes changed the tone and texture of television comedy'.[6] There are occasional hints in the literature of a larger context – Bedell notes that ABC had carved out its niche as a younger audience network early on, but 'nobody paid much attention',[7] and Brown and others admit that *sponsors* were becoming increasingly concerned with audience composition, albeit in the *late* 1960s – but the 'sea change' scenario has become the standard account of the networks' embracing of upscale demographics. Similar versions of the tale – all based on Brown's – are told in various broadcast surveys, network histories and critical works.[8]

The network quest for 'quality demographics' is generally linked, either as a direct cause or a parallel development, with an upgrading of the aesthetic and ideological nature of prime time, whereby programming experienced a 'renaissance' of sophistication and social significance. A typical (albeit entertainingly overstated) account holds that US television in the late 1960s appeared to have been 'frozen in Jell-O the day Ike left the White House', while shows with more contemporary sensibilities and/or more overt political discourse, like *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *All in the Family*, heralded a kind of renaissance; 'it was again worth our while to watch TV'.[9] The notion of a post-wasteland rebirth of quality and relevance is invoked in numerous renderings of this transition, with varying degrees of

2 Ibid., pp. 29, 55–6, 182, 241.

3 Jane Feuer, Paul Kerr, and Tise Vahimagi, *MTM: 'Quality Television'* (London: British Film Institute, 1984), p. 3.

4 Muriel Cantor, *Prime-Time Television: Content and Control* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1980), p. 77.

5 Sally Bedell, *Up the Tube* (New York, NY: Viking, 1981), pp. 31–6.

6 Todd Gitlin, *Inside Prime-Time* (New York, NY: Pantheon, 1983), pp. 210–18.

7 Bedell, *Up the Tube*, p. 34.

8 For similar accounts, all of which cite Brown, see James L. Baughman, *The Republic of Mass Culture* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Laurence Bergreen, *Look Now, Pay Later* (New York, NY: Mentor, 1980); David Marc, *Demographic Vistas* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984); Robert Metz, *CBS: Reflections in a Bloodshot Eye* (New York, NY: Signet, 1975); Lisa A. Lewis, *Gender Politics and MTV: Voicing the Difference* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1992); Robert J. Thompson, *Television's Second Golden Age: From* Hill Street Blues *to* ER (New York, NY: Continuum, 1996).

9 Richard Corliss, 'Happy days are here again', in Horace Newcomb (ed.), *Television: the Critical View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 64–76.

explicitness and critique. Significantly, the advent of this programming not only marked a perceived new era of quality for the medium itself, but helped advance the progress of television studies as a legitimate academic pursuit, providing a body of self-consciously political or reflexively modernist texts that academics could embrace and analyze without embarrassment. Critic Horace Newcomb points to this influence in an article on the development of scholarly television criticism, citing the early-1970s 'renaissance' as a factor in the growth of academic television criticism during the same period. 'The MTM shows, the Lear shows, *M*A*S*H*, and other works convinced many viewers, critics among them, that there was something here that had to be taken seriously', Newcomb writes. 'There was something here that could be lived with, in the sense that critics must always live with the objects of their concern, with a degree of affection, comfort, enlightenment.'[10]

While US prime time in the 1960s was much more diverse, interesting and aesthetically rich than typical historical accounts allow,

10 Horace Newcomb, 'American television criticism, 1970–1985', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, vol. 3, no. 2 (1986), p. 220.

Premiering in 1971 on CBS, *All in the Family* was part of a new wave of more topical and contemporary-themed programmes. The Norman Lear-produced series shook up prime time and attracted an upscale audience, but also ranked number one in mass ratings during its first five seasons. Picture from author's own collection.

***The Beverly Hillbillies* (1962–71) was a CBS ratings hit, but eventually became a symbol for the kind of programming (rural themes and rural/blue-collar/ lower-income appeal) that was dragging down CBS's demographic profile by the late 1960s. Picture from author's own collection.**

it is true that CBS built its ratings leadership during the decade on a core foundation of situation comedies, many of which had rural settings and themes: *The Beverly Hillbillies*, an absurdist farce about a backwoods family transplanted to the wealthy LA enclave of Beverly Hills; *Petticoat Junction*, centring on the humorous happenings at a small rural hotel; *The Andy Griffith Show*, a warm-hearted comedy about a small southern town and its sometimes eccentric inhabitants; *Gomer Pyle, USMC,* in which a good-hearted gas station attendant from that same southern town joins the US Marines, and so on. It is also true that with the arrival of shows like *All in the Family*, depicting a blue-collar bigot's confrontations with social change,[11] *The Mary Tyler Moore Show,* notable for its depiction of a single working woman, and *M*A*S*H*, an antiwar critique played out in a Korean War combat hospital, the tenor of the prime-time schedule in the 1970s was very different from that of even a few years before (although admittedly in some respects, such as a handful of shows surviving from the 1950s, it looked much the same). The fact is, US television's

11 Based on the British series *Till Death Us Do Part* (BBC, 1966–75)

fictional programming caught up with its news reporting, dramatizing the various social revolutions of the decade – the Civil Rights movement, black radicalism, women's liberation, youth unrest, opposition to the Vietnam War, and so on. Which is not to say that all of the efforts were as smart and successful as the handful of classics on which the critics tend to reflect—the first wave of self-consciously 'relevant' programmes were often unfortunate graftings of contemporary topics onto Hollywood melodramatics (*The Storefront Lawyers*, *The Young Rebels*, *The Interns*), and few lasted more than one season.[12]

12 For an informative account of the 'relevance' wave, see Harry Castleman and Walter J. Podrazik, *Watching Television* (New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 1982), pp. 221–3.

While there are multiple implications that could be pursued in the accepted account of how US television rode the transition from the 1960s to the 1970s, the year 1970 looms large in the literature as a pivotal moment in terms of both how the networks measured their audience and the impact of that reassessment, and that is the central focus of this essay. As with many 'overnight' shifts, this one had been in the works for some time. The 'crucial change' did not *begin* in 1970 but rather *culminated* then, capping more than a decade of research and rhetoric. Explicit concern for composition and indeed 'quality' of audience rather than sheer size had been developing throughout the 1960s. The events of 1970–71 did not constitute the abrupt, radical rethinking that critics and historians have depicted, but were a continuation of practices (and propaganda) that had been established years earlier. And the concrete impact of this supposed realignment of priorities is far from straightforward – indeed, it has arguably more hype than substance. This essay will amplify these arguments and document that context, charting the rise of 'demographic thinking' in the 1960s. The discussion will be framed largely by the contest between CBS and NBC – partly in order to focus the argument within the given space limits, and partly to 'track' the framework set by Brown et al. – a function of the fact that the demographic battle was largely waged between those two networks, ABC by the mid 1960s having set its sights on the 'young family' audience. Examining the uses to which these data were put, particularly their relevance to programme scheduling and retention, provides a broader and more detailed account of the real impact of demographics on programming, and highlights a number of ironies and ambiguities that arose from the emergent, and by no means uniform, exploitation of the demographic approach. Establishing the context for demographic-influenced practices in the 1960s as a foundation for the more familiar developments of the 1970s also suggests certain implications for the historiographical and critical arguments that generally permeate the standard historical accounts.

NBC: for those who think young

The case of NBC is worth considering in some detail. According to the standard account, NBC led the way in promoting the demographic makeup of its audience as a measure of programming value. Demographic thinking was largely the brainchild of Paul Klein, who sought to 'alter the rules' of the ratings game, in Brown's words, and whose 'push for demographics was timed to diminish the importance of CBS's dominance in the ratings by the old standard of circulation'.[13] The broad outline of this scenario is correct – Klein did indeed flaunt his network's demographic superiority at every opportunity, citing it as the criterion for leadership – but the journalistic focus on those few months in 1970 inevitably ignores essential institutional background and historical context. In fact, this sort of strategic redefinition of success was being employed by NBC at least as early as 1953, and was a staple of that network's prime-time promotion by 1963. Klein (who joined the network in 1961) was clearly a loyal adherent of the strategy but he did not suddenly launch it in 1970; rather, by that time it was an established NBC practice.

'Research Bulletins' and 'Research Highlights', released by the NBC Research Department throughout the 1950s and 1960s to analyze and promote the merits of NBC programming for sponsors and affiliates, are a revealing resource in tracing the trajectory of demographic thinking.[14] As these documents confirm, throughout the 1950s the network's primary goal was to garner the largest possible audience for its prime-time programming. The prime-time ratings Bulletins from this era emphasized one thing – mass circulation – touting NBC's 'improving competitive position' *vis-à-vis* CBS, its victories on certain nights or time slots, the Nielsen scores of specials, and so on. Significantly, the Reports during this period cited the numbers from either Nielsen, Arbitron or Trendex, whichever would present the network or the particular programme in the best possible light.[15] In an interesting contrast to the network's later partiality towards urban viewers, several 1953 and 1954 Bulletins chided CBS for basing its leadership claims on Trendex, which measured only nine eastern cities and Chicago and was therefore not viewed as representative of national audience size. (Four years later the Bulletins were trumpeting NBC as the number one network, based on the Trendex reports.)[16]

Notably, as indicated, as early as 1953 NBC was already taking notice of audience composition – and, explicitly, audience 'quality' – for its *daytime* programming. One Bulletin analyzed the 'audience quality' of the video-kindergarten *Ding-Dong School* along lines that would be familiar to a later generation of executives, touting the show's appeal to younger, better-educated, higher-income families.[17] Likewise, a series of Bulletins on the daytime audience from February 1956 begins with the following prescient paragraph:

Most advertisers know *how many people* or homes a program

13 Brown, *Televi$ion*, p. 241.

14 The NBC Research and Planning Bulletins and Research Highlights consulted for this paper are housed at the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theatre Research at the State Historical Society in Madison. For brevity in the text and footnotes, I cite the Research and Planning Reports, Research and Planning Bulletins, and Research Highlights as Reports, Bulletins, and Highlights, respectively. Note that numbering systems associated with these documents were not consistent throughout the years. When an issue number exists, it is cited. Documents that are not designated as part of any particular series (Reports, Bulletins, Highlights) are cited by their discrete title.

15 For example: Highlights, December 1952, no. 2; Highlights, January 1953, no. 2; Highlights, 'Nielsen TV pocket piece – 2nd October report', 30 November 1953; 'Advance Trendex ratings show NBC new shows closing the gap on CBS', 11 October 1957; 'November 1957 Trendex report – NBC improves competitive position against CBS', 14 November 1957.

16 Report, 'TV network audience leadership – facts vs fantasies', 4 June 1953; Hugh M. Beville, Jr, NBC interdepartmental correspondence, 26 October 1954; Highlights, 'Latest competitive network standings show NBC no. 1 position', 21 October 1958.

17 Bulletin, '"Ding Dong School" analysis', no. 50, 13 May 1953.

reaches but few are aware of the *kind of people* in the audience. The quality of a program's audience is particularly important since it tells the advertiser if he is reaching the *prospects and customers* for his product.[18]

Admittedly, as far as the prime-time schedule was concerned, the largest audience share was still the network's primary goal in the 1950s, and it remained the main focus of the Research Bulletins into the early 1960s. Nevertheless, the major ratings services were offering demographic breakdowns of the audience by the late 1950s,[19] and as the new decade dawned there were early hints that the networks were gaining a growing appreciation of reaching the 'right' audience in prime time as well. For example, a 1960 NBC Bulletin sketched Arbitron's breakdown of the prime-time viewing audience by age (which was drawn rather broadly: children twelve and under, teens thirteen to seventeen, men eighteen and over, women eighteen and over).[20] A practical indication of the emerging importance of audience composition came in spring 1961, when Chevrolet pulled its sponsorship (and strong product identification) from NBC's musical variety hour, *The Dinah Shore Chevy Show*, because it attracted older and wealthier viewers who tended to purchase more expensive cars than Chevy's solid blue-collar models.[21] The carmaker retained the same Sunday timeslot for the following season, throwing its support behind the entire hour of the popular Western series *Bonanza*, which at that time had a younger family appeal, and continuing its full sponsorship of the family comedy *My Three Sons* on ABC, and a 'participation buy' in *Route 66* on CBS (that is, purchasing one half-hour of the hour-long drama). Chevrolet's television advertising choices at this juncture are worth considering for a moment, as the firm was following two distinct sponsorship strategies, one of which was on the wane in the industry, the other on the rise. Its full sponsorship of *Bonanza* and *My Three Sons* followed the one-show–one-sponsor model established in radio, while its underwriting of one half of *Route 66* was consistent with the growing trend towards various forms of multiple sponsorship. Already by 1960 fully half of prime-time programmes were supported by more than one sponsor, and many advertisers, like Chevy, were buying 'participations' or commercial minutes in more than one show. The trend was partly a response to increasing programme costs, which made it progressively more difficult for one sponsor to underwrite an entire weekly programme according to the traditional model, and, more compelling by most accounts, a function of sponsors' efforts to 'spread costs over a multiplicity of shows in order to gain reach and circulation', as *Variety* put it.[22] 'Participating sponsorship' or 'scatter buying' of ads was aimed principally at reaching the greatest number of viewers and/or increasing the odds of having some exposure in a 'hit' show, but obviously the

18 Bulletin, 'The characteristics and buying habits of the daytime TV audience', no. 1, 3 February 1956. Eight other bulletins in the series, based on a Home Testing Institute study, followed, ending 1 March 1956.

19 Hugh Malcolm Beville, Jr, *Audience Ratings: Radio, Television, and Cable* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates, 1988), pp. 37, 112–114; Douglas Gomery, 'How Nielsen and Arbitron became the ratings kings', *The Library of American Broadcasting Transmitter*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2001), pp. 3, 7. URL: www.lib.umd.edu/umcp/lab.

20 Bulletin, 'ARB audience composition', no. 202, 21 April 1960.

21 Albert R. Kroeger, 'They're dealing new hands in Detroit', *Television*, March 1961, pp. 49–50 ff.

22 Murray Horowitz, 'Plot sickens for half hours', *Variety*, 17 October 1962, p. 21. See also 'Why the rush to hour-long shows?', *Broadcasting*, 17 April 1961, pp. 108–9, which likens participating sponsorship to the way 'the prudent investor spreads his investment capital over a number of stocks rather than plunging it all on a single company'.

approach could also be used to target specific audiences, as Chevrolet was attempting to do with both its single sponsorships and participation buys. Still, although targeted advertising was on the rise, the rhetoric of NBC's prime-time Bulletins around this time maintained a general emphasis on gross ratings, using selective statistics to justify calling itself 'the #1 television network', and boasting 'the largest national audience'.[23]

In 1963, however, a pronounced emphasis on 'quality' of audience began to appear in the NBC Bulletins for nighttime programming. A January Report noted that 'advertisers know they ring doorbells to sell to people and not to homes', and stressed that ratings figures alone did not give an accurate picture of 'an actual competitive situation'. An April 'Highlights' touted the strength of the psychiatry drama *Eleventh Hour*, which tied with the ABC Sunday movie as the top programme among female viewers aged eighteen to thirty-nine (according to Arbitron), and argued that the show's Nielsen 'slant' towards 'the younger, middle and upper income, better-educated parents', made it a 'real 'find' for the advertiser'. By November the network was broadening its claims, calling itself 'the leading network for upper income, upper educated young adults'.[24] The latter claim was based on a study from the National Testing Institute (the source of TvQ), which featured demographic categories that would become standard Nielsen equipment by the end of the decade (age, education and income of head of household). The NBC Report, subtitled 'which network is really first – a look behind the average ratings', clearly anticipates the sort of strategic claims NBC would be making in spring 1970. The Report pointed out that overall ratings leader CBS actually *trailed* NBC according to this measurement, leading instead in the lower-educated, lower-income, age fifty-five or older homes. Whatever strength CBS and ABC had in the young, affluent, upper-educated homes, the Report claimed, was caused by children in those homes controlling the dial (for example, the stone-age cartoon *The Flintstones* rated well in such households, but its audience was only 40% adult).

At about this time NBC also began promoting the aesthetic quality of its programming, and its consequent ability to attract a more desirable audience segment. The 19 November Highlights just cited pointed out that

> NBC's schedule is composed largely of dramas and anthologies. Over half of NBC's schedule contains programming which varies week to week. This kind of programming, while not producing consistent top ten ratings, does recruit the biggest audience from the important discriminating upper part of the socio-economic scale.

The piece went on to deride what it called the 'low-end' situation comedies on CBS (including *The Beverly Hillbillies* and *Petticoat Junction*), whose homes rating for upper-slant groups was distorted by their 'kiddie' viewers. A subsequent Bulletin continued the argument,

23 Highlights, 'The number one evening network: NBC-TV', 14 November 1961; Highlights, 'NBC – the #1 television network', 6 November 1961.

24 Highlights, 'What's in a home', 9 January 1963, p. 1; Highlights, 'For your analysis – *Eleventh Hour*', 8 April 1963; Highlights, 'NBC emerges as the leading network for upper income, upper educated young adults (which network is really first – a look behind the average ratings)', 19 November 1963.

suggesting that NBC's programmes garnered the more desirable audience slant due to its programming of 'anthologies and anthology-type programs' (which included *Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color*, *Espionage*, *The Richard Boone Show*, *Kraft Suspense Theater*, *Chrysler Theatre*, *Monday Night at the Movies* and *Saturday Night at the Movies*). This Report explicitly expressed the notion of the 'quality' of audience in its title. CBS's ratings successes in prime time, the Report pointed out, were due to 'old-slanted' programmes, or sitcoms that attracted children and older viewers. Likewise, a series of December Bulletins emphasized NBC's leadership among younger, more affluent, better-educated adults, charging that CBS's homes lead was won by its strength with older viewers – and proclaiming NBC 'the young adult network'.[25]

One particularly revealing Report pointed out the young-adult leadership of certain NBC shows compared to more highly rated CBS shows – such as *Dr Kildare* vs *Rawhide*, *Mr Novak* vs *What's My Line*, *The Lieutenant* vs *I've Got a Secret*, *The Richard Boone Show* vs *Danny Thomas*, *Saturday Night at the Movies* vs *Ed Sullivan*, *Kraft Suspense Theater* vs *Petticoat Junction* – in each case arguing a demographic advantage for shows that were running deficits in overall ratings.[26] Similarly, a January 1964 Bulletin boasted that the addition of the political satire show *That Was the Week That Was* (*TW3*) to the NBC schedule would be a certain enhancement of 'the network's position as the young adult, upper income network'. This American incarnation of the British hit, the Report argued, was the ideal vehicle for 'reaching a quality audience composed largely of young, college educated, upper income family homes'. And indeed – based on the November special cited – the better the skew the higher the rating, with roughly a twenty-two average audience rating in all the 'right' categories (household income, household size, age of housewife, education of head of household, occupation of head of household), versus a sixteen for the nation.[27] Interestingly enough, a subsequent Report on the performance of the series' January 1964 debut ignored the show's audience slant in favour of its ratings, highlighting an impressive thirty-six share. However, the Report's title did allude to the show's demographics with a pointed comparison to the rural slant of CBS's ratings blockbuster, dubbing *TW3* 'the urban *Beverly Hillbillies*'.[28]

The NBC Research Bulletins and Highlights continued in the same vein throughout the mid 1960s, with regular claims of being the 'number one network among young adults', 'the leading network among the better marketing groups', the 'preferred network among college-educated adults', and/or the leading network in the top-ten young adult programmes.[29] In addition to age, education and income as 'quality' factors, by mid decade the significance of region was given a more pronounced emphasis, with NBC boasting of its slant towards the 'best marketing targets' – upper-income urban families – and its ratings

25 Highlights, 'NBC emerges'; Bulletin, 'The size and quality audience of NBC's anthology programs', no. 262, 25 November 1963; Bulletin, 'The young adult audience – NBC leadership confirmed by 26 ARB local market reports', no. 263, 3 November 1963; Bulletin, 'NBC Has 5 of the top 10 young adult programs', 3 December 1963; Highlights, 'Half hour wins among young adults by network', 6 November 1963.

26 Bulletin, 'Another look behind the ratings', 11 December 1963.

27 *NBC Research Highlights Bulletin*, 6 January 1964

28 Highlights, '*TW3* – the urban "Beverly Hillbillies"', 13 January 1964.

29 Among numerous examples, circa 1965–66: Highlights, 'NBC – the number one network among young adults', 1 November 1965; Bulletin, 'Summary of network

audience 1963–64 season', no. 266, 5 May 1964; Highlights, 'TV-Q indicates that NBC is the preferred network among the college-educated adults', April 1965; Highlights, 'The golden dozen', 6 November 1966; Highlights, 'NBC attracts record number of young (18–49) adults', 27 November 1966.

30 Highlights, 'The latest data on *Run For Your Life*'s audience', 9 May 1966; Bulletin, 'NBC has higher ratings in the top US markets', 17 August 1966.

in 'affluent urban areas', and generously recommending that 'advertisers of commercial fertilizer would be better off on another network'.[30]

These Reports demonstrate that NBC was indeed paying attention to demographics, and promoting the ability of certain programmes or programme types to attract more upscale viewers. One has to read between the lines, however – and read the fall schedules over several years – to discern the real purpose of this data and its apparent influence on programming. In short, its purpose was rhetorical and its influence negligible. More than anything these Reports underline the fact that for NBC circa 1963, the value of demographics rested largely in its usefulness in a post-facto defence of low-rated programmes, rather than as a proactive tool in programme decisions. Despite the network's crowing about its young adult advantage, leadership with the 'right' viewers was not enough to save most of these programmes. The supposedly prized anthologies of *Boone*, *Espionage* and *DuPont* were canceled at the end of the season, as were *Lieutenant* and *Eleventh Hour* (*Boone*, *Espionage* and *Lieutenant* after only one season). *TW3*, despite being impeccably upscale, not to mention critically acclaimed, was also canceled at the end of its first full season. Given the fate of these shows, it is reasonable to infer that *Dr Kildare*'s survival was due less to its young adult viewers than to the fact that it was in the top twenty Nielsen winners (outrating *Rawhide*, we should note) for the season. Likewise, while *Saturday Night at the Movies* may have been able to boast superior delivery of younger women, it also earned a respectable 21.4 share – significantly higher than many of the other upper-slant programmes that the NBC Bulletins were promoting.

Countless examples of these demographic comparisons appear in the NBC Bulletins from 1963 through to the tumultuous days of 1970. NBC not only trumpeted its own demographic leadership, but also made certain to highlight the older slant of CBS, and ABC's dominance in the children and teen audience. Yet clearly, in practice, NBC's self-proclaimed status as the 'young adult network' did not signify a change in programming philosophy as much as an emergent, statistically grounded, rhetorical strategy by which to defend programmes whose average audience share was below par. In the early 1960s, as in the early 1970s, when NBC could not post a victory by traditional measurements, it highlighted those aspects of the data where it *could* claim an advantage. In another prescient move, at the end of the 1964–65 season, NBC claimed a three-network tie for homes reached, and pointed out that it was 'the only network that cared to speak at any length about the number and kind of viewers in its audience'. NBC's 'superiority in quality audience', the Report charged, was 'the only real ratings difference between the three networks' – much the same claim it would make in 1970.[31]

31 Highlights, 'NBC increases its lead as number one adult network', 22 July 1965.

It is instructive to note that while CBS was NBC's most frequent target in (selective) demographic comparisons, the near-absurdities of

NBC's ballyhoo played out in much the same fashion on the ABC front. For example, a 1965 Report attempted to deflate ABC's ratings victories by emphasizing that the third-ranked network's only real strength was in its share of children and teenagers. Similarly, in early 1966 another NBC Report derided ABC's camp superhero entry *Batman* because of its almost exclusive appeal to kids; yet several NBC Reports in the autumn of the same year boasted that its frenetic made-for-television pop group vehicle *The Monkees* was the most popular prime-time show among viewers under eighteen.[32]

The largely situational, expedient and rhetorical value of NBC's 'young adult' argument is further underscored by the fact that NBC continued to stress its 'mass' successes whenever and however it could. With claims ranging from television's 'most-viewed programmes' (seven of the top ten 'entertainment' shows for one semi-monthly Nielsen report), dominance in the top ten programmes (for one week, due to two specials), leadership in 'reach' (with the top five shows that fulfilled 'the primary objective of most advertisers – greatest possible reach'), to outright Nielsen victory (for example, in homes-per-minute, or the first Nielsen results of the season) – the NBC Reports would marshal evidence that could be spun favourably by considering selective criteria or time frames.[33]

One aspect of NBC's superiority that did not need to be embellished was its leadership in colour programming, which gave it an undeniable edge in attracting more desirable demographics. 'The peacock network' increasingly touted the advantages of colour programming in reaching 'upper' homes as colour sets became more widespread and its menu of colour programming grew. A 1964 Report entitled 'A New Look at the Color TV Set Owner' noted that colour set owners represented 'an "elite" group among the general population': they were wealthier, better-educated, professional/managerial – and heavier television viewers – than owners of monochrome receivers. A March 1965 Bulletin reported that while the first wave of colour set buyers tended to be older, upper-income people, the more recent owners were 'larger, younger, upper-income families', and a subsequent profile of colour set owners noted that both current owners and prospective buyers were not only younger ('centering in the prime-earning 35–49 age group') and in higher income and education brackets, but also more urban. A December Report cited a Brand Ratings Index study that correlated colour set ownership with heavier spending patterns on household products, convenience food, travel and 'status symbols', as well as more 'venturesome' buying habits (such as trying modern products).[34]

By 1965 about 6% of total 'television homes' owned colour sets, and, not surprisingly, colour shows attracted significantly higher ratings in 'colour homes' than in homes with black-and-white sets, which translated into a small but significant enhancement to overall ratings for colour shows, and thus for NBC.[35] While there is no question that the primary motivation driving the shift to colour was the sale of colour

32 Bulletin, 'ABC's home built on crumbling (not building) blocks', 8 February 1965; Highlights, 'Batman's TvQ profile', 28 February 1966; Highlights, 'Monkees are "top banana"', 12 November 1966.

33 Highlights, 'NBC continues to have TV's most-viewed programs', 11 November 1964; Highlights, 'NBC dominates top ten charts', 29 November 1964; Highlights, 'The top five programs in reach are NBC's', 8 February 1965; Highlights, 'NBC's number one position (with honor) is reaffirmed', 15 March 1965; Highlights, 'NBC wins first Nielsen nationals of the season', 12 October 1966.

34 NBC Research Bulletin, no. 264, 26 March 1964; NBC Research Bulletin, 'Summary of ARB national color TV survey', no. 272, 24 March 1965; Bulletin, 'A profile of color TV set owners and prospective buyers', no. 278, 21 May 1965; Bulletin, 'A product usage profile of color TV set owners', 3 December 1965.

35 George Rosen, '64-'65: Nielsen in full color', *Variety*, 8 July 1965, p. 19; NBC Research Bulletin no. 272, 'Summary of ARB national color TV survey', 24 March 1965.

sets by the network's parent company, RCA, and the desire to capture more of the mass audience through the novelty of 'tint-ups' as colour receivers were adopted more widely, NBC's move towards an all-colour prime-time schedule carried obvious, if ancillary, demographic benefits. With NBC the first to go 'all colour' in 1965, it was the primary beneficiary of that segment of 'homes' leadership as well as the demographic benefits that accompanied colour shows, and the network played up those benefits in its propaganda. As one Bulletin put it, sponsors of NBC's colour shows could reach both the 'class' (colour owners) and 'mass' (black and white) audience.[36]

Ultimately, even with its promotion of the colour advantage, at mid decade NBC's attention to demographics was largely a defensive strategy, an attempt to provide more favourable shadings for its numbers. From a programming standpoint, the size and not the quality of the audience was still the primary force in determining a show's survival. Yet if NBC's substantive employment of its demographic data was largely rhetorical during the early 1960s, nevertheless it is clear that by mid decade 'demographic thinking' had begun to take hold in the industry. As *Variety*'s George Rosen observed in early 1965: 'This year as never before Madison Ave advertisers and tv analysts are scrutinizing audience composition and demographic data'.[37]

And the quest for the upper audience slant did begin to exert a more active influence on programming as the decade wore on. Although demographics were not an apparent factor in selecting or developing programming, as they ostensibly would become in the early 1970s, by 1967 they began to play a role in the retention of programmes with marginal audience share (twenty-eight to thirty-one). In a 1967 article in *Television* magazine on programmes in this 'vast grey belt', recently-installed vice-president Klein observed that 'quality' of audience was the most important criterion for evaluating such shows. 'A quality audience – lots of young adult buyers – provides a high level that may make it worth holding onto a program despite low overall ratings', Klein suggested, citing this as a key factor in *Star Trek*'s renewal. As Klein told *TV Guide* in a later interview, *Star Trek* was retained 'because it delivers a quality, salable audience' – particularly 'upper-income, better-educated males'. There was a limit to the power of demographics of course, and Klein pointed to *The Rogues* (a family of aristocratic jewel thieves headed by Charles Boyer and David Niven) as an example of a programme that delivered a quality audience but did not rate well enough to avoid cancellation. *Tarzan*, on the other hand, was dropped despite an acceptable homes rating because, in Klein's words, 'it hadn't been delivering the right kind of people. Too many kids and old ladies.' (This despite an NBC Highlights just a few weeks earlier that glowingly dubbed *Tarzan* an 'all-family program'.)[38]

Klein argued that 'a 16 share on *Saturday Night At The Movies*, we found, is better than a 30 audience on *Petticoat Junction*', but in fact, Klein and company retained no programmes that posted less than a

36 Bulletin, 'How NBC color programs compare with selective magazines in reaching a "class" audience', 27 November 1965.

37 Rosen, 'For those who think young', *Variety*, 20 January 1965, p. 47.

38 Walter Spencer, 'TV's vast grey belt', *Television*, August 1967, p. 74; Richard K. Doan, 'Why shows are cancelled', *TV Guide*, 15 June 1968, reprinted in Barry G. Cole (ed.), *Television* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1970), p. 124. Klein cites *The Rogues* in the Spencer article, and comments on *Tarzan* in the Doan interview. See also Highlights, 'Tarzan – an all-family program', 22 March 1967.

twenty-eight share at the end of the 1966–67 season – and the comparison was curiously moot, since at this time NBC's Saturday feature film package had been earning a thirty-five share or better – far from 'grey-belt'.[39] The reality was that for all of the research department's rhetoric, NBC's sales department could not sell a show based on demographics alone. An upscale shading certainly helped, but as one industry observer noted, the cases of advertisers deliberately buying into third-place competitors in a time slot were rare, no matter what the audience composition.[40]

While the use of demographic data to determine the fate of marginal shows constitutes a more concrete factor in programming decisions, it also reinforces their status as largely a post-facto measure rather than an active development or scheduling tool, one that allowed NBC – as it did in 1964, and would again in 1970 – to declare victory over CBS on its own terms. As the 1960s wound down, the network was still using demographics largely to put a 'young adult' spin on its lineup. While the network was proactive in adding some youth-oriented shows like the rapid-fire topical satire *Laugh-In* and the globetrotting espionage drama *I Spy* to its schedule, it was a far from wholesale infusion of hipness. Indeed, the NBC Reports expressed no embarrassment over the fact that its top-rated shows nationally – *Bonanza*, *The Virginian*, *Disney's Wonderful World of Color* – some of which had been on the schedule since the late 1950s, were also among the highest rated for older viewers. In fact, Klein's research department was quick to herald the fact that the long-running *Bonanza* was soundly beating CBS's musical–comedy satire *Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* in overall ratings – despite the fact that *Smothers* was among the very top shows in the educated/affluent/professional audience segment.[41] Adding irony to ambiguity, when CBS canceled the seventh-ranked *Red Skelton* comedy–variety show in the spring of 1970, NBC – which had knocked the show as 'old-slant' two years earlier[42] – promptly picked it up for the autumn schedule. All of which further illustrates the degree to which NBC's pointed celebration of young adult viewership was more talk than action. But if NBC's efforts were less than a full-scale campaign for the quality audience, that is not to say that its demographic push and rhetoric had no direct effect on programming. It did, just as it would in 1970, at CBS.

Quo vadis CBS: class or corn?

That question – directed at the medium in general, not just CBS – was posed by *Variety* in June 1963. The upcoming season was posited as the most ambitious in years, particularly in the area of serious dramatic series and star-powered musical–variety shows, and a pivotal year for US television. The success or failure of these 'classier' offerings, the reporter predicted, would determine 'the IQ level of future network seasons'.[43] The 'class or corn' question was a particularly pointed one

39 Spencer, 'TV's vast grey belt', p. 55.

40 Richard Donnelly, 'They're off! (as often as not)', *Television*, March 1967, p. 24.

41 Highlights, '*Bonanza* lead over *Smothers Bros* biggest ever', 16 February 1969. On the demographic makeup of these and other programmes, see Dick Hobson, 'Who watches what', *TV Guide*, 27 July 1968, reprinted in Jay S. Harris (ed.), *TV Guide: The First 25 Years* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1978), pp. 147–50; Richard Donnelly, 'Television's big target: young marrieds', *Television*, January 1967, pp. 52–3.

42 Highlights, 'Sock it to 'em!', 3 April 1968.

43 Herm Schoenfeld, 'Quo vadis TV: class or corn?', *Variety*, 26 June 1963, p. 27.

for CBS, at which network president James Aubrey was simultaneously programming the period's most ambitious dramas (for example, the issue-oriented courtroom drama *The Defenders* or the peripatetic social problem drama *Route 66*) and its most defiantly lowbrow – and highest-rated – rural farces (such as *Beverly Hillbillies* or *Petticoat Junction*) in the prime-time schedule. It was a tightrope walk between retaining the network's 'Tiffany' image and maintaining ratings dominance, and the balance, in most observers' eyes, was already tilting towards 'corn'.

Of course the facts of network life at this time dictated that television executives spent more time reading the Nielsen Reports than pondering the artistic trajectory of the medium. It is clear that the mass ratings constituted CBS's central goal in the early 1960s, and that sponsors were largely willing to stick with success in those terms. Certainly the network was not averse to exploiting the prestige of its own quality or anthology-style shows like *The Defenders*, *East Side, West Side* and *The Great Adventure*, which it could boast about in trade ads, before Senate subcommittees and in stockholder meetings. And demographics were an emerging if ancillary benefit; for example, as early as 1962 sales material for *The Defenders* contrasted the show's adult audience segment with that of the competition.[44] But *The Defenders* was an exception – a happy coincidence of critical acclaim, prominent awards, upslant demographics, and Nielsen scores high enough for a four-year run. Minus the ratings, shows like *East Side, West Side* (the struggles of a New York social worker) and *Great Adventure* (an anthology of colourful tales from US history) did not stand a chance. CBS took the accolades when it could get them, but such shows were retained only as long as the prestige could be combined with respectable ratings. The exceptions were high-prestige documentary series like *Eyewitness* and *CBS Reports*, which survived by virtue of their value for 'balance' and public service, as well as the aura of class and seriousness they brought to the network.[45] CBS was certainly aware of the young/urban/upscale audience these shows attracted, but these viewers were a by-product rather than a target market – the target was the largest possible audience. Looking back a few months after his dismissal as network president, James Aubrey explained his approach in very simple terms: 'I felt that we had an obligation to reach the vast majority of most of the people. Unfortunately, the people began to indicate through the ratings service a preference for certain particular shows. We made an effort to continue purposeful drama on television, but we found out that people just don't want an anthology. They would rather tune in on *Lucy*.'[46] Or *The Beverly Hillbillies*, as the case may be. In short, Aubrey and company did not look at the nuances of audience segment but rather the mass, and, following those cues, continued to give the people what they ostensibly 'preferred'.

There is no doubt that the blockbuster ratings of *The Beverly Hillbillies* and other CBS hits were what kept the network's stock high

44 CBS promotional booklet for *The Defenders*, 1962. Reginald Rose papers, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theatre Research at the State Historical Society.

45 For a superb critical analysis of 1960s TV documentary, see Michael Curtin, *Redeeming the Wasteland: Television Documentary and Cold War Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, 1995).

46 Richard Oulahan and William Lambert, 'The tyrant's fall that rocked the TV world', *Life*, 10 September 1965, p. 94.

during Aubrey's tenure. CBS's ratings were so superior in 1964 that CBS was essentially blind-selling its prime-time schedule, locking sponsors into a time slot to be filled later by a programme which, according to a CBS representative, 'Mr Aubrey will select'.[47] Although chief programmer Mike Dann was less high-handed in his methods after the autocratic Aubrey's departure in 1965, CBS's ratings leadership continued, as did its quest for 'the vast majority of most of the people'. Meanwhile, as I have shown, its major competitor's emphasis ostensibly was shifting. Witness the trade advertisements of the two rivals: while a CBS advertisement in *Variety* in January 1965 boasted of the presence of eleven CBS titles in the top fifteen prime-time shows, an NBC advertisement a few weeks later staked a claim for NBC as the best choice for viewers in the eighteen-to-forty-nine age group.[48] Obviously each network was highlighting an existing strength: CBS touted its top-rated shows, while NBC downplayed gross ratings and stressed audience composition. Still, the changes were not far off. NBC's barrage of comparative demographic ballyhoo may have been constructed, rhetorical and post facto, but the network made the most of it. As historians have told us, CBS began to take heed – but some time earlier than we have been led to believe.

CBS took its first serious moves in translating demographic concerns into programming action during the 1966–67 season. The familiar version of CBS's demographic transformation relates that the network took a hard look at itself in 1970–71, largely due to NBC broadsides about the aging of its audience, canceling *Petticoat Junction*, the *Red Skelton* and *Jackie Gleason* comedy–variety hours in 1970, and a host of rural-oriented programmes a year later. Since these moves were carried out under the guidance of a newly arrived CBS television president Wood, it is easy to see why credit for them might be laid at his feet. But as at NBC, the changes of 1970 and 1971 at CBS were not 'the first stage in a thorough reordering of priorities', as Brown asserts, but in fact a culmination of sorts. Aubrey, Dann, et al. had certainly been reading the comparative rhetoric from NBC since the early years of the decade, and watched major sponsors shift their advertising dollars from older-slanted shows to ones with younger and/or broader appeal, and by 1966 CBS was overtly reconsidering its bias towards older audiences on a broader scale, and translating its findings into action. In the middle of the 1966 season, in a clear foreshadowing of its 'rural purge' of 1970 and 1971, the network announced the cancellation of five programmes – the long-running Western *Gunsmoke*, the game shows *What's My Line, I've Got a Secret* and *To Tell the Truth,* and the hidden-camera ambush *Candid Camera* – that, in *Variety*'s words, 'were judged to be performing poorly in the 18–34 age group'. While the overall ratings for these shows were also in decline, *TV Guide* called the move a symptom of 'the current network rage for entertainment of known young-adult appeal'.[49]

CBS programmer Dann recalled in an interview several years later

47 George Rosen, 'Paley's pouch-money, that is', *Variety*, 22 January 1964, p. 33.

48 CBS advertisement, *Variety*, 27 January 1965, p. 82; NBC advertisement, *Variety*, 24 February 1965, p. 37.

49 'CBS reshuffle: emphasis on youth', *Broadcasting*, 27 February 1967, p. 25; Richard K. Doan, 'End of the line', *TV Guide*, 17 June 1967, reprinted in Harris (ed.), *TV Guide*, pp. 132–4.

that his network was indeed following NBC's lead in looking at the demographics of its programmes at this time. *Gunsmoke*'s ratings in 1966 would have been acceptable by traditional measures, Dann suggested, but in light of NBC's demographic comparisons, a decision was made that Marshall Dillon and company were setting the bias too far in favour of the old, and the series was canceled. However, not long after the cancellation was announced, the twelve-year-old Western was reinstated through the intervention of CBS chairman William Paley, in a new time period. In its new berth in the schedule, *Gunsmoke* jumped back to fourth place in the Nielsens, and, notably, although it was a popular show among the over-fifty set, it also attained virtually the same young-adult profile as *Star Trek*.[50]

The example of *Gunsmoke* illustrates a rather obvious but key point: hit shows – shows that earned large overall ratings – inevitably captured a decent share of the upscale demographic into the bargain. This should not be overlooked, especially in the context of changing ad-buying patterns. Multiple sponsorship continued to increase as the

50 On the demographics of *Gunsmoke* (and other shows), see Donnelly, 'Television's big target," pp. 52–3.

***Gunsmoke* (1955–75) was a CBS stalwart and one of the most highly-rated US prime-time shows during its run. Despite its age and long-standing appeal to older adults, its appeal was broad enough that even as late as 1972 it ranked among the top ten series in overall ratings. Picture from author's own collection.**

dominant model during the decade, and by 1970 participation sponsorship and scatter buying covered well over 90% of prime time.[51] As noted earlier, advertisers used this strategy chiefly to achieve circulation, but it could also be used for demographic targeting. Interestingly, the one sacrifice that came with participation sponsorship was the loss of a close association between a product and a show – most clearly exemplified by sponsor-identified anthology dramas like *Chrysler Theater* or *The Alcoa Hour*, but also clearly a factor in popular dramas like *Bonanza* ('brought to you by Chevrolet') and *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (sponsored exclusively by Lincoln–Mercury in the early 1960s). Somewhat ironically, as demographic consciousness developed, attempts by sponsors to maintain prestige or goodwill associations with individual shows largely faded, but it was a sacrifice they seemed willing to make. A 'buy' in a show like *Gunsmoke* hit a broad audience that also included a significant upscale segment. In Dann's view, *Gunsmoke*'s rebirth 'broke a great myth about its demographics, and ended up breaking the back of *Laugh-In*'.[52] The programme also gained revitalized ratings and remained in the top ten for the next six seasons. The three quiz shows and *Candid Camera* were not as fortunate, however, and their cancellation was final.

The impact of demographics (and NBC's rhetoric) on CBS programming in 1966–67 was not only one of negative moves. As at NBC, demographics were a factor in the survival or decline of 'grey-belt' shows, the espionage thriller *Mission Impossible* being a notable CBS entry whose survival was aided by its 'quality audience'. Toeing the traditional company line, CBS director of audience measurement Arnold Becker argued that 'there are an awful lot of people who put exaggerated importance on young audiences', but in the next breath admitted that 'given equal amounts of audience, we would rather have them younger'.[53] Of course the implicit corollary was that, given *unequal* audience shares, they would rather have the larger.

In addition to rescuing marginal raters, demographic thinking was exerting a discernible influence in programme development at CBS. In sketching the 1967 season for *Television* magazine, Dann announced a trend towards 'reality comedy', taking a direct swipe at some of the fantasy–escapist sitcoms in which his network had specialized during the Aubrey years (for example, *The Munsters*, *Gilligan's Island*, *My Favorite Martian*). In the new season's lineup, he declared, 'Nobody disappears, nobody is marooned on an island, nobody is from another planet'. Dann drew particular attention to two new sitcoms for which CBS had high hopes, *He and She* and *Good Morning World*, both of which centred on young characters in urban settings.[54] In addition, with an aging Garry Moore variety hour dying opposite NBC's *Bonanza*, Dann and his Los Angeles programming lieutenant, Perry Lafferty, decided to counter-programme with *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*, which combined contemporary music with pointed social satire, in an explicit effort to attract the younger (fifteen-to-thirty) audience

51 Single-sponsor shows accounted for between 3% and 7% of prime-time shows by 1970, depending on the source consulted. Leo Bogart (ed.), *The Age of Television* (New York, NY: Frederick Ungar, 1972), pp. 425–6, proposes 7%, and Sydney W. Head, *Broadcaating in America* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), p. 267, offers 3%.

52 Dann is quoted in Jack Stanley, *A History of the Radio and Television Western Dramatic Series* Gunsmoke, *1952–1973*. PhD Dissertation. University of Michigan, 1973 (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms), pp. 177–81.

53 Spencer, 'TV's vast grey belt', p. 81.

54 Ralph Tyler, 'The 1967–68 season', *Television*, June 1967, p. 37. The shows were both thematic and institutional forebears of the MTM stable of comedies. Not only did *He and She* and *Good Morning World* depict young urban professionals trying to 'make it' career-wise, both had reflexive, entertainment-industry premisses. The former was created by Bill Persky and Sam Denoff, regular *Dick Van Dyke Show* writers, the latter directed by *Van Dyke* veteran Jay Sandrich. All three worked on the young/urban-slanted *That Girl* in 1966; Sandrich would go on to become a key director on *Mary Tyler Moore*, and Persky and Denoff later wrote for MTM's *The Betty White Show* (1977).

with the comedy duo's 'irreverence'.[55] Happily for the programmers, the show also proved to be an unqualified ratings success.

The rural comedies (along with *Gunsmoke* and Lucille Ball) were still entrenched in the CBS schedule, of course, and not surprisingly, since they were also entrenched at the upper end of the Nielsens. But it is clear that CBS was rethinking its bias, and that NBC's incessant demographic comparisons were beginning to make themselves felt. Sweeping aside the faltering game shows, and (temporarily) *Gunsmoke*, the first of the CBS programming 'purges' was underway in the winter of 1966–67, more than two years before Robert Wood joined the network's executive ranks, and long before the allegedly radical changes of 1970. Like his counterpart at NBC, Wood would not be charting a daring new direction as the decade began, but embracing an existing strategy.

And CBS's renaissance of sophistication under Wood was not without its own ironies. Although Dann and company were actively scheduling programmes that promised attractive demographics, they still managed to hang on to the 'mass', and to dominate the Nielsens. As for CBS's elimination of its rural programmes in 1971, the operation might better be described as a pruning than a purge. Of the shows canceled, only *Mayberry RFD* (an updated version of *The Andy Griffith Show*, minus star Griffith) and *Hee-Haw* (a kind of countrified *Laugh-In*) even ranked in the top twenty (fifteenth and sixteenth, respectively); the others were largely played out as ratings winners. While the decision to jettison those two fairly strong bucolic comedies and retain an even lower-ranked *Mary Tyler Moore Show* does attest to significant changes in network ideology, it is also, of course, wholly consistent with the well-established practice of giving upslant programmes a chance. At the same time, the continued presence of the highly-rated *Here's Lucy* (Lucille Ball's second post-*I Love Lucy* sitcom) and the venerable *Gunsmoke* attest to the continued importance of the mass ratings. *All in the Family*, revered for its audacity and topicality, also had the good fortune to become a mass-audience blockbuster, so we will never know if its demographics (or 'relevance') would have ensured its longevity in the case of marginal or poor ratings – the same goes for *Mary Tyler Moore* and *M*A*S*H* and any number of other such 'quality' shows. When the dust of the 1970 rural purge and ratings wars had settled, the most concrete impact of demographics was still primarily felt in deciding the fates of those shows in the 'grey belt'. If there is happy medium between quality of audience and size, there can be little doubt that quality demographics *and* big ratings were the happiest compromise of all.

The pursuit of quality: contexts and continuities

Of course Brown's claim that 'bulk circulation, which once had been all-important to the networks, was becoming irrelevant' was an

55 Dwight Whitney, 'Irreverent is the word for the Smothers Brothers', *TV Guide*, 10 February 1968, reprinted in Harris (ed.), *TV Guide*, p. 143.

overstatement, perhaps a product of dramatic (journalistic) licence.[56] As the 1970s wore on, mass ratings maintained considerable importance, and made for some rather interesting programming juxtapositions in terms of audience slant as well as style. Controversial sitcoms from producer Norman Lear shared the Nielsen top ten with *Gunsmoke*. Old-skewed, high-rated shows like *Here's Lucy* and *Barnaby Jones* (a geriatric detective) held their own with the hipper but equally popular *Sonny and Cher* and *Flip Wilson* comedy–variety shows, and all prospered. By the late 1970s CBS had no trouble living with both the prestige of *M*A*S*H* and the redneck appeal of *The Dukes of Hazzard* (southern good-old-boy Robin Hoods in a souped-up Dodge Charger), each a top ten Nielsen winner. What I am suggesting, of course, is that the gross Nielsen rating numbers were still paramount, and demographic data continued to provide post-facto shadings for programme decisions and sponsor targeting, just as they had ten years earlier.

None of this is meant to diminish the importance of the events of 1970–71, but to emphasize that the developments that led up to them are equally, if not more, important, and that the whole subject of demographics and its place and effect on television during the 1960s and 1970s (and the 1950s, 1980s and 1990s) needs to be documented more fully and carefully. The CBS–NBC contest of 1970 marked a stage in a process, part of a long-term evolution of network practices, rhetoric and ideologies surrounding the definition and value of the television audience. We cannot fully understand that transition and its significance without considering the two decades of network philosophies and practices that led up to it.

All of which suggests several points by way of conclusion. Charting the quest for 'quality demographics' as an evolutionary process rather than an explosion reminds us of the risks inherent in 'Great Man' accounts of history – in this case the attribution of the sea change circa 1970 to the personal vision of Klein at NBC and Wood at CBS. Taking these 'single-handed' accounts at face value obscures the complexities and ambiguities of the process, ignores the development of these practices (and the rhetoric) over time, and overlooks the *continuities* of practice and strategy that were in fact being maintained at both networks. Gitlin, for example, quotes Wood extensively on his apparently single-handed hauling of CBS into the demographic age, with Dann (whom Gitlin did not interview) painted unilaterally as the foot-dragging, ratings-hungry voice of the old guard. This young turk versus old guard version of events is complicated most obviously by Dann's own 1967 cancellations, but also by his programming of the upmarket *He and She*, his scheduling of the controversial *Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* and his advocacy for *All in the Family*, not to mention, a few years earlier, his reported defence of prestige drama during the Aubrey regime.[57] It is also worth noting that Wood, for whom 'relevant' was the watchword of the new CBS in 1970, had the

56 Brown, *Televi$ion*, p. 29.

57 Metz, *CBS: Reflections in a Bloodshot* Eye, pp. 44, 293–305, 320.

previous year canceled the high-rated, topical, young-skewed – and controversial – *Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* on the pretext of a missed production deadline.[58]

Likewise, to understand Klein's actions at NBC, one must recognize that the quality/upscale audience agenda had begun well before he arrived at the network in 1961. Demographic information data was part of the ratings currency by the late 1950s, and the NBC research department under Hugh Beville, Jr (Klein's predecessor as vice president) increasingly exploited it. As noted earlier, NBC was trumpeting the demographic superiority of its daytime lineup as early as 1953, scrutinizing prime-time audience composition by 1960, and making audacious claims of 'young adult' leadership by 1963. The point here is not to defend Dann's forward-thinking nature, or to replace Klein with Beville as the rightful author of the NBC 'young adult' propaganda campaign, but to caution against such simplistic accounts of individual authority, to highlight the complexity of the historical terrain, and to argue, quite simply, for a broader, longer, and deeper perspective. As in any industry, television executives do have real power and they exert it, setting policies and making decisions that have measurable impact on the cultural landscape of programming and schedules. But they do so within organizational constraints, and upon a foundation of established systems. Wood and Klein did not revolutionize network practices, they maintained and adapted existing ones.

The real impact of those practices is also worth considering in a much more careful fashion. Beyond the concrete if tenuous effect on programming (*vis-à-vis* retention and development), we need to cast a more critical eye on the notion of 'quality' itself, both as it was used by the industry in the 1960s and 1970s to refer to audiences and programming, and as it has been invoked in academic history. In reviewing the rhetoric of quality demographics, it is difficult to ignore the tone of condescension, bordering on contempt, for less desirable audience segments, especially older and rural viewers. To say that such viewers were undervalued in the new demographic thinking is an understatement – they were explicitly unwanted. And if the older, rural viewers were at the fringes of the radar, racial minorities might as well have been in another solar system. The unstated but implicit word in every network construction of 'young adult' or 'urban, educated' was of course, 'white'. While this is not the place for an extended discussion of the implications of the network discourse on 'quality', the relevant tensions at play in the industry as the demographic mindset took hold are intriguing. On the one hand the networks – especially NBC – increasingly trumpeted their ability to deliver younger more affluent audiences to their advertisers. Meanwhile, advocates for older viewers and some industry insiders were arguing that the networks were missing a large and lucrative market by overlooking the fifty-plus age group in their quest for younger viewers, while still other observers

58 Bert Spector, 'A clash of cultures: The Smothers Brothers vs CBS Television', in John E. O'Connor (ed.), *American History/American Television* (New York, NY: Frederick Ungar, 1983), pp. 159–83; Steven Alan Carr, 'On the edge of tastelessness: CBS, the Smothers Brothers, and the struggle for control', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 31, no. 4 (1992), pp. 3–24.

proposed that the importance ascribed to the young adult audience by advertisers was in fact 'far in excess of their numbers or their definable buying power'.[59] (This could help explain why in practice the networks' demographic talk tended to outstrip their concrete programming action.)

Similarly, while networks executives solemnly called on producers to incorporate broader and more accurate portrayals of black people in their shows,[60] both the networks' rhetoric and their programming strategies made it clear that their ideal target audience was predominantly the white middle and upper-middle class. The plea for more integrated casting could itself be seen as much as a reflection of, and/or appeal to, the liberal sensibilities of the upscale audience as it was an attempt to do the right thing – but perhaps this is too cynical. In any case, while some critics have argued that US television was doing its audience a disservice by programming innocuous, escapist fare during a time of wrenching social change, it is just as reasonable to argue that the pursuit of a young, urban, educated, affluent (white) audience segment was a betrayal of the medium's democratic promise, as well as a breach of broadcasters' responsibility to serve the public interest. In the final analysis, of course, the arrogance, ageism and implicit racism of the rhetoric is ultimately more disturbing than the practice, for, as we have seen, the networks continued to programme by and large for the masses, trying to garner the upscale audience as part of the bargain, all the while hoping for the breakout hit. Nevertheless, the explicit proclamations that the eighteen-to-thirty-five, urban, college-educated, upper-income viewer constituted the 'quality' audience means, of course, that the other 60%–80% were considered inferior on all fronts; the ostensible quest for a certain demographic profile at the exclusion of others raises fundamental questions about the broadcasters' moral and social responsibility during this period.

That said, if the industry language of demographic quality often seems smug and elitist, we should recognize that the same core assumptions that ground the network rhetoric of the 1960s and 1970s have often tended to form the basis for our own accounts and evaluations as historians and critics, with the pursuit of upscale demographics applauded for raising the sophistication level of prime time and clearing away the vulgar, raucous escapism of the wasteland years. It was 'again worth our while' to watch television; it was 'something that could be lived with'. In other words, with the advent of the Norman Lear and MTM shows, cinema scholars and English professors discovered television. 'Television for us', as it were. And in embracing a certain type of programme, there was clear demarcation between acceptable texts and unacceptable ones, and, by extension, a subtle (or sometimes not so subtle) derision of the tens of millions of viewers who might actually have found meaning and pleasure in the likes of *Gunsmoke* or *The Beverly Hillbillies*.

The corollary to the first signs of television studies' acceptance

59 Eugene Feehan, 'The over-50 age group', *Television*, June 1967, pp. 20–21, 44–7; Donnelly, 'Television's big target', p. 23.

60 Murray Horowitz, 'CBS, NBC reiterate pro-Negro stand on casting but meaningful drama on integration still lacking', *Variety*, 31 July 1963, p. 22.

within academia in the mid 1970s was that, moving forward, the medium's scholars focused almost without exception on contemporary texts, and the programming landscape of the 1960s was left largely unexplored. This was not just a question of timeliness (or trendiness), but returned to that issue of value. *Hill Street Blues*, *Twin Peaks* and *Six Feet Under* are obviously art, but what can be made of *The Beverly Hillbillies*? In short, 1960s television was presumed to be understood well enough (and not all that worthy of serious attention anyway). Lynn Spigel and Michael Curtin, in the introduction to their recent anthology on 1960s television (a first – and more than two decades overdue), write that even at that late date (1997) '1960s popular television is still largely conceptualized as "Wasteland", (or in some circles, "Camp"), fare'.[61] US television has not been accorded anything like the sustained, systematic historical exploration that cinema has, but the decade between the quiz show scandals of 1958–59 and the 'renaissance' of 1970 has been especially overlooked. It is an open question whether, say, the tragicomic moralizing of *M*A*S*H* was ultimately more uplifting and artistic than the surreal populism of *Green Acres*, but thus far the notion of a 'renaissance' and the sophistication ostensibly bred by the demographic revolution has been largely accepted as self-evident – mythicized rather than analyzed.

The 1970 and 1971 seasons undeniably mark a significant period for US television, but considered in context it was clearly more a denouement than a dawn. We need to acknowledge that the foundation for the demographic strategies of the early 1970s was put in place over time, and also recognize the role, thus far overlooked, that demographics played in shaping *1960s* television – not, perhaps, a profoundly dramatic role, but no less influential than the one that played out in the 1970s. Indeed, the *continuities* of 'demographic thinking' across the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s are striking, with every supposedly radical, abrupt or audacious ploy of Klein or Wood circa 1970 echoing actions carried out years under earlier network regimes.

And the continuities extend to this day. In recent years CBS has increasingly, albeit tentatively, indicated a willingness to embrace the older audience that has long been its traditional strength, and that its competitors have sought to avoid. While CBS has not gone so far as to trumpet itself as the number one network among aging suburbanites, it has taken another look at the data, not simply equating 'quality' audience with 'young urban', but acknowledging and reacting to the buying power of older adults, and trying to convince advertisers of their value.[62] This could be interpreted as much as acceptance of an established niche as an active strategy to cultivate an audience, but such 'spin' should hardly be surprising – it is the mirror image of NBC's own rhetorical tactics for going on thirty years. And those tactics remain essentially unchanged from the template set in 1963, as NBC continues to crown itself the number one network among young

61 Lynn Spigel and Michael Curtin, *The Revolution Wasn't Televised: Sixties Television and Social Conflict* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), p. 12.

62 CBS's public stance on the older audience over the past decade has ranged from 'comfortable' to 'eagerly pursuing'. See 'Producers miffed as CBS shuns youth-oriented shows to woo an older crowd', *TV Guide*, 30 September 1989, South Texas edition, pp. 49–50; Rick Kogan, 'A show of neglect', *Chicago Tribune*, 6 August 1992, section 5, pp. 1, 11; Jane Glenn Haas, 'Networks warned of perils in ignoring viewers over 50', *Chicago Tribune*, 1 October 1993, section 5, p. 3; Marl Hart, 'Mature viewers gain stature in ratings war', *Chicago Tribune*, TV Week, 31 November 1996, p. 1; Steve Johnson, "Out with old, in with 18–49', *Chicago Tribune*, 21 October 1999, section 5, pp. 1, 8.

adults – in those years when it does not lead in overall ratings, that is.[63] The sense of *déjà vu* that accompanies such pronouncements underscores the truly seminal nature of the practices and propaganda of 'quality demographics' in the 1960s, which set the stage for the manoeuvres and machinations of the early 1970s and beyond.

63 In spring 1999, with all the numbers in, CBS regained its spot as the most-watched network for the first time in five years – and NBC discounted the victory because CBS trailed in attracting the eighteen-to-forty-nine demographic; the same scenario played out again in May 2001. Yet in 2002, when NBC had bragging rights to first place in the ratings, the network trumpeted its mass Nielsen status, remaining curiously quiet about its demographic superiority. See Allan Johnson, 'CBS wins network title; rivals are unimpressed', *Chicago Tribune*, 27 May 1999, section 3, p. 1; Sharon Waxman, 'Zucker targets NBC's aging nightly lineup', *USA Today*, 24 June 2001, p. G01.

Comedy verite: contemporary sitcom form

BRETT MILLS

The majority of the analysis of television sitcom form argues that it has, in contrast to many other television genres, developed little since it was first created. Arising out of the US networks' desire to employ popular comedic vaudeville names in regular formats and timeslots, the genre developed as a compromise between its theatrical origins and the necessary strictures of television and radio broadcasting. Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik consider *The Jack Benny Show* (CBS, 1950–64; NBC, 1964–65) to be the programme in which these tensions were most successfully worked through, resulting in a form which featured regular characters and setting, but which, unlike vaudeville and the sketch show, utilized a 'repeatable narrative'.[1] Since this initial development, US sitcom has, according to John Hartley, seen 'few fundamental changes'.[2] Similarly, Stephen Wagg's history of the development of British sitcom structure begins and ends in one decade, with all subsequent series merely offering different content within the same narrative form.[3] Thus, while it is possible to trace histories of the television drama which demonstrate a movement away from its theatrical origins and the emergence of a more complete television aesthetic,[4] such a history is not apparent for sitcom. The 'remarkably stable'[5] nature of the sitcom form is, therefore, one of its most established generic aspects.

This stability has been seen as running parallel to a constancy in sitcom content, with the genre criticized for its simplistic use of stereotypes, outmoded representations and an apparent failure to engage with social or political developments. The preponderance of sitcoms centred on the family is seen to reinforce assumptions about

1 Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik, *Popular Film and Television Comedy* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1990), p. 227.

2 John Hartley, 'Situation comedy, Part I', in Glen Creeber (ed.), *The Television Genre Book* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), p. 65.

3 Stephen Wagg, 'At ease, corporal: social class and the situation comedy in British television: from the 1950s to the 1990s', in Stephen Wagg (ed.), *Because I Tell a Joke or Two: Comedy Politics and Social Difference* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1998), p. 3.

4 See Jason Jacobs, *The Intimate Screen: Early British Television Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

5 Hartley, 'Situation comedy, Part I', p. 65.

domestic normality.[6] These representations are regarded as springing from an often unquestioned 'heteronormativity',[7] in which gender distinctions are presented as natural and comedic content revolves around heterosexual desire. This process, particularly in a patriarchal society, is confounded by the genre's propensity to render women only as 'comic objects ... peripheral to the production of the humour'.[8] Similarly, in terms of race, Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis find that any progressive element that may exist in the content of *The Cosby Show* (NBC, 1984–92) can be understood only in terms of conventional, white representations that render all divergence from ideological norms as unrepresentative stereotypes.[9]

Of course, there have been series which are recognized as offering progressive representations within the sitcom form. *Roseanne* (ABC, 1988–97) has been examined for its portrayal of the 'unruly woman',[10] in which the title character, in physicality, performance and politics, successfully questions the norms for female representation within television sitcom. Similarly, *Absolutely Fabulous* (BBC, 1992–) has been read as a further celebration of the unruly woman while simultaneously critiquing the excesses of consumer culture.[11] Yet the debates which persist concerning series such as *Ellen* (ABC, 1994–98) and *Will and Grace* (NBC, 1998–) demonstrate how series which may have progressive elements cannot escape the 'representational trap'[12] regarded as inherent in mainstream comedy. Thus *Ellen*'s difficulties in retaining an audience once the title character came out as gay is considered representative of the US networks' ignorance of how to present gay characters successfully,[13] while *Will and Grace*'s representations are variously valorized or vilified depending on whether they are viewed as a celebration of camp or as a straightforward rehash of gay stereotypes.[14]

Furthermore, sitcom has been criticized for failing to place its representations – whether progressive or not – within a larger social context, and for representing class, race or gender conflict as nothing more than personal squabbles and ignoring broader aspects of ideology. Darrell Hamamoto argues that while there have been attempts to respond to social changes in order for sitcom content to remain comprehensible, the commercial nature of the institutions which produce the programmes inevitably leads to 'repression'.[15] And while this is a critique levelled at other narrative forms, for sitcom it seems magnified in the face of (as Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque suggests) comedy's assumed social role to say the unsayable, question the accepted and undermine authority.[16] For David Grote, the sitcom has 'overturned more than two thousand years of comic traditions and established an entirely new and unique form of comedy',[17] which replaces comedy's anarchic social role with a repressively commercial one. Following this argument, developments within sitcom content are irrelevant, for the genre is 'fundamentally a conservative form',[18] an opinion that prevails despite the different

6 Neale and Krutnik, 'Popular film and television comedy', p. 239.

7 Kathleen Battles and Wendy Hilton-Morrow, 'Gay characters in conventional spaces: *Will and Grace* and the situation comedy genre', *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, vol. 19, no. 1 (2002), pp. 87–105.

8 Laraine Porter, 'Tarts, tampons and tyrants: women and representation in British comedy', in Wagg (ed.), *Because I Tell a Joke or Two*, p. 69.

9 Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis, *Enlightened Racism:* The Cosby Show, *Audiences, and the Myth of the American Dream* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992).

10 See Patricia Mellencamp, *High Anxiety: Catastrophe, Scandal, Age, and Comedy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. 338–50; Kathleen Rowe, *The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1995).

11 Pat Kirkham and Beverley Skeggs, 'Absolutely fabulous: absolutely feminist?', in Christine Geraghty and David Lusted (eds), *The Television Studies Book* (London: Edward Arnold, 1998).

12 Richard Dyer, *Only Entertainment* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 146.

13 See Jane Feuer, 'The "gay" and "queer" sitcom', in Creeber (ed.), *The Television Genre Book*.

14 See Battles and Hilton-Morrow, 'Gay characters in conventional spaces', and Jane Feuer, '*Will and Grace*', in Creeber (ed.), *The Television Genre Book*.

15 Darrell Hamamoto, *Nervous Laughter: Television Situation Comedy and Liberal Democratic Ideology* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1989), p. 1.

16 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984).

17 David Grote, *The End of Comedy: the Sit-Com and the Comedic Tradition* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1983), p. 12.

18 Jim Cook, 'Introduction', in Jim Cook (ed.) *BFI Dossier 17: Television Sitcom* (London: British Film Institute, 1982), p. 2.

theatrical heritages of British and US sitcom. Whether the genre's origins lie in theatre, music hall, vaudeville, cinema or a combination of these, the resultant form is seen to have remained stable for decades and is now such a part of the global television language that a significant number of US and British series are sold in a wide range of foreign markets.[19]

The conservative nature of sitcom content, then, can be seen to go hand in hand with, and be upheld by, the stable form of the genre. However, in this essay I shall make a distinction between the two, with particular reference to a number of recent comedy series on British television. In the past decade or so it could be argued that sitcom has begun to develop and mutate, and is doing so in a manner which requires a reappraisal of the accepted understandings of sitcom form. Furthermore, such developments, it will be shown, are representative of, and respond to, changes which have occurred within other television forms, such as the documentary and the docusoap.

To explicate this argument I shall consider *The Office* (BBC2, 2001–). This series represents the apotheosis of this new form of sitcom, with the deliberate use of the characteristics of other television forms not only offering new ground for the sitcom, but also resulting in a programme which complicates conventional genre divisions and, by extension, uses debates about the nature of performance and representation within the media for its comic material. Such characteristics are also apparent in other recent British television series, such as *The Day Today* (BBC2, 1994), *Brass Eye* (Channel 4, 1997, 2001), *People Like Us* (BBC2, 1999, 2002), *Marion and Geoff* (BBC2, 2001–02), and *Human Remains* (BBC2, 2001). All of these series demonstrate new forms for the sitcom, ones that undermine accepted notions about the stability of sitcom's characteristics and its representations.

Vital to an understanding of the sitcom – by both the academy and audiences more generally – are its music hall origins. That is, while many histories of television outline the medium's development from theatre, it is apparent that the majority of genres have now evolved their own televisual language. Sitcom, as I have suggested, is not seen in this way. Andy Medhurst and Lucy Tuck, for instance, suggest that a major part of the pleasure derived from sitcom results from its attempt to recreate the music hall experience.[20] This is usually demonstrated through discussion of the laughter track, and the audience being positioned as the 'fourth wall'. Indeed, sitcom is one of the few genres that are still, on the whole, shot in front of a live audience, and staged as if theatre. Medhurst and Tuck see this format as 'the electronic substitute for collective experience',[21] with such theatrical staging used to create the group atmosphere necessary for a social phenomenon such as laughter. Putterman suggests that sitcom's only concession to its

19 Hartley, 'Situation comedy, Part I', p. 65.

20 Andy Medhurst and Lucy Tuck, 'The gender game', in Cook (ed.), *BFI Dossier 17*, p. 45.

21 Ibid.

televisuality was the introduction by the production team on *I Love Lucy* (CBS, 1951–59) of a 'three-camera set-up',[22] meaning that any exchange between two characters could be filmed as a mid-shot covering both performers, as well as a closeup being trained on each. Putterman argues that this shooting style was developed the better to capture Lucille Ball's reaction shots, the reaction being vital to the production of comedy. While traces of such staging are still apparent in many British soap operas, the majority of television drama abandoned the fourth wall long ago, using a variety of camera angles to create a complex and fully-formed narrative space. Sitcom, on the other hand, retains a shooting style which serves to 'encode presence and the status of live performance'.[23]

The look of sitcom, then, is one which foregrounds the aspects of its own performance, offering pleasure in the presentation of verbal and physical comic skill. While acting is an area of textual analysis that is still notoriously undertheorized, it is apparent that distinctions are conventionally made between comic and serious performance. Indeed, many US sitcoms are structured precisely around a comedian's performance – *Roseanne*, *The Cosby Show* (NBC, 1984–92) and *Seinfeld* (ABC, 1990–99), for example – signalling the centrality of that performance in their eponymous titles. While such a tradition is less apparent in British sitcom, comic actors have conventionally moved from sitcom to sitcom, carrying their comic associations with them, for example Ronnie Barker in *Porridge* (BBC1, 1974–77), *Open All Hours* (BBC1, 1976–85), *Going Straight* (BBC1, 1978) and *Clarence* (BBC2, 1988). Steve Seidman, analyzing film, calls such forms 'comedian comedy',[24] and suggests that narrative and verisimilitude are downplayed in such texts. Here the foregrounding of the star, and their individual, iconic performance legitimizes the existence of the text, the plethora of jokes justifying the lack of a coherent narrative in a manner unavailable to other forms.

However, this is not to suggest that all sitcoms completely conform to such genre characteristics. There is a history of sitcoms that do not use a laughter track, most notably *M*A*S*H* (CBS, 1973–84), which Larry Mintz explores precisely for this reason.[25] In addition, *M*A*S*H* employs a less obviously theatrical performance style and, while not constructing a complete narrative space, is less concerned than most other sitcoms with positioning the audience as the fourth wall. However, Mintz has difficulty in accepting *M*A*S*H* as a sitcom precisely because of its abandonment of these theatrical signifiers. His note that it does not 'look like a sitcom'[26] betrays the notion that the sitcom form is so rigid and easily identifiable that any deviation from it, no matter how minor, results in a text that then asks to be understood as something else.

These easily identifiable characteristics that are taken to be inherent in sitcom are indicative of a need for the genre, and comedy more generally, to signal its comic intent as quickly and unambiguously as

22 Barry Putterman, *On Television and Comedy: Essays on Style, Theme, Performer and Writer* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1995), p. 15. While this development was partly a requirement of compromises made between the show's stars and the network, Mellencamp finds it is a 'technological rather than economic innovation', in 'The unruly woman', p. 322.

23 Ibid.

24 Steve Siedman, *Comedian Comedy: a Tradition in Hollywood Film* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Research Press, 1981).

25 *M*A*S*H* exists in two versions, one with and one without a laughter track, the former shown in the USA and the latter in Britain. See Mark Lewisohn, *Radio Times Guide to TV Comedy* (London: BBC, 1998), p. 427.

26 Larry Mintz, 'Situation comedy', in Brian Rose (ed.), *TV Genres: a Handbook and Reference Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), p. 112. A similar difficulty in defining programmes is found in Mike Clarke, *Teaching Popular Television* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1987), p. 106, as Clarke attempts to categorize *The Young Ones* (BBC, 1982-84).

possible. Schechner argues that all performed communication requires 'metacommunication'; that is, 'a signal that tells receivers how to interpret the communication they are receiving. For example, winking an eye or holding up crossed fingers while speaking indicates to the listener that the speaker's words are not to be taken seriously.'[27]

The analysis of comedy has conventionally rested on the assumption that the standard form of communication is a serious one, and thus it is comic intent which must be clearly signalled to ensure the intended reading is made by an audience. John Allen Paulos calls such signals 'metacues',[28] while Jerry Palmer terms them 'para-linguistic markers'.[29] While the precise manner in which such signals work has yet to be adequately explored, the vital point is that comedy – whether social or broadcast – must adopt the conventions of such markers to achieve its intentions. That is, while the ideological import, offensiveness, meaning or funniness of any piece of humour is open to debate, the fact that something was intended as funny is, thanks to metacommunication, rarely misread. It may be this reliance on cues which has forced sitcom to maintain a rigid form over many decades.

Metacommunication or paralinguistic markers are necessary partly because humour works more effectively when its intention to be funny is unambiguous. However, their presence is also representative of the need to distinguish between humour and seriousness as clearly as possible. By having a visual form and genre characteristics that are not only as coherent as possible but are also distinctive from those for serious programming, the sitcom can be seen to revoke its claim to engage with anything other than its humour function. Instead, the audience position offered by sitcom 'is manifestly one of the satisfaction of watching sitcom',[30] and the distinctions between sitcom's form and those of other genres help to maintain and promote such satisfactions, while clearly distinguishing them from those offered by more 'serious' forms.

Indeed, expectations for comedy serve to legitimize a number of conventions uncommon in other genres. So while much British and US television has developed a realist aesthetic, entertainment television is judged in terms different from those for other, more 'serious' forms, particularly in terms of 'the real'.[31] Furthermore, while most fiction in any medium attempts to hide the fact that it is a fiction formed around codes of construction, sitcom relies on its artificiality not only as part of its metacommunication, but also for its very effectiveness. Thus 'sitcom naturalism' is based on audiences 'suspending disbelief in return for pleasure',[32] in which the laughter track, the theatrical shooting style and the displayed performance clearly demonstrate sitcom's artificial status and its clear, precise, single-minded aim: to make you laugh. In this way sitcom is a 'transparent' genre.[33]

However, this is not to suggest that audience readings necessarily respond consciously to such artificiality; the sitcom is not, after all, a Brechtian text. Instead, Jim Cook sees sitcom's 'dual-reading focus'[34]

27 Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: an Introduction* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2002), p. 92.

28 John Allen Paulos, *Mathematics and Humor* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 52.

29 Jerry Palmer, *The Logic of the Absurd: on Film and Television Comedy* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), p. 23.

30 Barry Curtis, 'Aspects of sitcom', in Cook (ed.), *BFI Dossier 17*, p. 9.

31 John Corner, *Television Form and Public Address* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995), p. 175.

32 Peter Goddard, *'Hancock's Half-Hour*: a watershed in British television comedy', in John Corner (ed.), *Popular Television in Britain* (London: British Film Institute, 1991), p. 80.

33 Hartley, 'Television sitcom, Part I', p. 65.

34 Jim Cook, 'Narrative, comedy character and performance', in Jim Cook (ed.), *BFI Dossier 17*, p. 18.

as one in which audiences are made aware of sitcom's artificiality while simultaneously adopting the engaged reading position common for most television fiction. Audiences, then, find pleasure in sitcom in a manner similar to most narrative television, while the text constantly reminds them of its artificiality; audiences are simultaneously distanced *and* engaged. Such a contradictory position is one vital to comedy generally, in which laughter requires an involvement with, and a detachment from, that which is funny.

While there is a lack of audience-based studies to find out if this is actually how viewers make sense of sitcom, such a contradiction mirrors that of the social role of comedy. On the whole, comedy and sitcom are low cultural texts, seen as less important than news, documentaries and 'serious drama'[35] by broadcasters, policymakers, academics and audiences. The nature of sitcom, then, is one in which its texts, and its texts' intentions, are signalled as clearly and as often as possible. Sitcom's distance from standard forms of realism is indicative of the assumption that serious subjects should be treated seriously, and that there are appropriate forms and genres for doing so. Of course, this is not to say that nothing in sitcom has any serious import; indeed sitcom has been critiqued as representative of deep-seated, prevalent, hegemonic attitudes within society.[36] However, by distancing itself from the verisimilitude associated with other, more serious genres, sitcom form signals its intentions to be understood as nothing more than entertainment. It is this which has led to critics maligning sitcom as 'committed to harmony and consensus',[37] with comedy's potential subversiveness neutered by the industry's commercial requirements.

My argument here is that the conventional sitcom form has been repeatedly challenged in recent years. Programmemakers have begun to abandon some of the genre's most obvious conventions and have replaced them with the formal characteristics of other, distinct genres. In this way, the distinction between the ways in which the comedic and the serious are conventionally signalled have begun to be dismantled, and this has occurred in a manner that explicitly questions television's role in setting up such a distinction. To outline these developments I shall focus on the most critically acclaimed new television sitcom in Britain: *The Office*.

When *The Office*, written by Ricky Gervais and Steve Merchant, was first broadcast it was a relatively low-key affair, screened as part of BBC2's Monday night Comedy Zone. It quickly garnered much critical acclaim – winning Baftas[38] in both 2002 and 2003 – and, on its repeat showing in 2002, steadily built a solid audience. So far there have been two series of six episodes, and two final episodes were broadcast as part of the BBC's 2003 Christmas schedule, this time on the more mainstream BBC1. The series, like most sitcoms, deals with a group of people in a specific environment, in this case, a stationery distribution

35 John Caughie, *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism and British Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 24.

36 See, for example, Hamamoto, 'Nervous laughter'; David Marc, *Comic Visions: Television Comedy and American Culture* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989); Gerard Jones, *Honey, I'm Home! Sitcoms: Selling the American Dream* (New York, NY: St Martin's Press, 1992).

37 Marc, 'Comic visions', p. 118.

38 Baftas are the awards given by the British Academy of Film and Television, and are (probably) the most respected and desired awards for British film and television makers.

office in Slough. There are four main characters: David Brent (Ricky Gervais), the office manager, who believes he is a hilarious comedian and insensitively tramples over his workers in his attempts to be funny; Gareth (Mackenzie Crook), David's assistant, who adores him and incessantly tells stories of his own Territorial Army experiences; Tim (Martin Freeman), a sales clerk, whose desire to leave the office and start a degree in psychology signals his dissatisfaction with, and distance from, the office ethos; Dawn (Lucy Davis), the secretary, who is soon to be married but who clearly has the possibility of a relationship with Tim.

The series' humour arises out of the interplay between these characters, but often does so through presenting embarrassing situations as laughable. Thus Brent spends much of the series convinced that his employees adore him, that his job is meaningful and that his philosophical musings on life are profound. His inability to perform appropriately in social situations, coupled with an enormous sense of self-importance, creates a monster of a boss whose employees are powerless to question him. In the second series, the merging of two of the stationery distributor's branches suddenly means Brent has a superior, and subsequent episodes explore his attempts to work out his new role within the office. The series plays on the notion of embarrassment by incorporating many shots of Brent's employees looking aghast at what he says and does; that is, their response is as vital to the comedy as the events themselves are. While clearly scripted, the whole is performed in a faux-improvizational style, so that the performance is noticeably different to that in the majority of sitcoms, although it has appeared in US series such as *The Larry Sanders Show* (HBO, 1992–98), and *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (HBO, 2000–), as well as the Australian series *Kath and Kim* (ABC, 2002–).

In many ways, *The Office* conforms to the expected characteristics of sitcom, with the single setting, the recurring characters with conflicting personalities and the single narrative problem in each episode. Similarly, the fact that it was broadcast as part of the designated Comedy Zone signals the programme's comic intent and predisposes audiences to certain readings.

However, the programme – as *M*A*S*H* before it – does not look like a sitcom. Its opening titles do not signal to an audience the programme's comic intent. We are shown a series of shots of Slough highways and roundabouts, until we make our way to an industrial estate and the office itself. The theme music is a downbeat song, 'Handbags and Gladrags',[39] in contrast to the standard upbeat music and brightly lit opening titles associated with many other sitcoms.[40] This low-key atmosphere is representative of the look of the programme as a whole. Shot on hand-held cameras, with muted colours and abandoning the fourth wall, the programme uses the visual signifiers of another new form of television: the docusoap.

While 'docusoap' is a contested term – particularly between the

39 Written by Mike D'Abo in the 1960s, a cover version of the song was recorded especially for the programme by Big George.

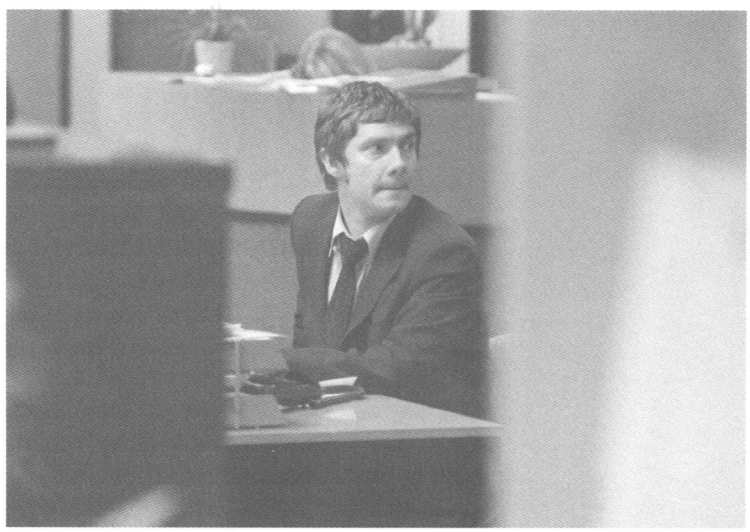
40 Curtis, 'Aspects of sitcom', p. 5.

academy and the wider public – for my purposes it can be seen as a form in which traditional documentary shooting techniques are aligned with editing practices more associated with popular drama or soap opera.[41] Beyond these formal qualities, docusoaps also differ from traditional documentaries in their choice of more obviously entertaining subjects, featuring characters such as traffic warden Ray Brown in *Clampers* (BBC1, 1998).[42] Thus the visual nature of docusoaps is one arising from their documentary heritage, and is significantly distinct from sitcom. The fictional recreation of that style in *The Office* demonstrates not only sitcom's new-found engagement with alternative modes of representation, but also inevitably critiques the necessity for the distinction between the two forms. I shall return to the implications of this later.

The Office, then, is narratively structured and shot as if it is a docusoap. The camera appears to roam the office, capturing events as they happen, with jerky, hand-held shots and, frequently, pictures that are out of focus. Like much docusoap, it also incorporates interviews with its participants in which they talk about events in the office that the audience has just witnessed. The series thus acknowledges its mediation, but in a manner dissimilar to that of comedy's typical 'dual-reading focus'. Instead, the programme appears to act as if it were a real documentary or docusoap. Thus, the fictive reconstruction of a factual form puts the mediated processes of the documentary on display while actively obscuring those of comedy. The effects of this are twofold. Firstly, by adopting the characteristics of another form, *The Office* responds to the debate concerning genre hybridity which is at the core of analyses of the docusoap, which in itself undermines purist definitions of genres such as the sitcom and the documentary. Secondly, by accurately recreating the textual surface and possible audience pleasures associated with docusoap form, it also refers to the

41 See Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary: a Critical Introduction* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2000), p. 76.

42 See Stella Bruzzi, 'Docusoaps', in Creeber (ed.), *The Television Genre Book*, p. 132.



Tim (Martin Freeman) casts a despairing look as the camera roams the office. Picture courtesy: BBC Photo Library.

David Brent (Ricky Gervais), as if caught by covert filming from another room. Picture courtesy: BBC Photo Library.

critiques of the legitimacy and objectivity in documentary that many theorists have outlined.[43]

The programme thus uses the aesthetics and conventions of docusoap, but for comedic ends. The incidences of characters acknowledging the camera are intended to be funny, and they also work with and against our understanding of what the docusoap can tell us. It is noticeable that in much of *The Office* humour is constructed through documentary rather than sitcom conventions. For example, while the characters usually know they are being filmed, there are also moments when they do not. The programme usually signals to its audience this covert filming by having objects in the way, most commonly a window blind, so that the camera crew is apparently in a different room to the action. In one such moment Brent is shown getting ready to interview an attractive job applicant; he puts on aftershave (rubbed from an advertisement in a men's magazine) and sits in a variety of positions to work out which will appear the most attractive when the interviewee first sees him. While jokes in sitcom often revolve around the ways in which characters are seen and how they wish to be seen, in conventional sitcom form the distinction between public and private is one that exists only diegetically, with characters within the programme the only witnesses to public actions. By using docusoap characteristics, however, *The Office* makes Brent's private actions ones he wants hidden from both the diegetic audience (his coworkers and the camera crew) and the extradiegetic one (the implied audience at home). Thus the existence of the television audience is made explicit and used for comedy purposes, whereas in conventional sitcom the audience exists as a laughter track only, an extradiegetic phenomenon unknown to sitcom's characters. This leads to an odd reversal where, by discarding the laughter track, *The Office*

43 See Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, Brian Winston, *Lies, Damn Lies and Documentaries* (London: British Film Institute, 2000).

abandons the audience's function as a metacommunication signalling comic intent and instead uses the audience as part of the diegetic comic meaning of the programme.

Indeed, the programme abandons many of the ways in which sitcoms have traditionally signalled, and ensured, their comic intent. The docusoap format used by *The Office* removes the availability of the three-camera set-up to record comic reactions, because the docusoap conventionally does not employ this kind of set-up and is unlikely to be capable of capturing events in a manner which would be smooth enough to lend itself to traditional sitcom editing. Instead, in order to capture reactions to events the camera conventionally focuses on the speaker's face and then quickly pans across to capture any reaction. As a result, the viewer often misses the beginning of a character's reaction, which, in a three-camera set-up, would be neatly recorded in its entirety. In this manner, *The Office* constructs character interaction that looks less structured than conventional sitcom, while still getting the laughs from the reaction.

This is demonstrated in the way in which *The Office*'s characters respond to the camera. As would be expected, like most docusoap characters those in *The Office* attempt to act as if the camera is not present.[44] On the whole, everyone acts as if they are not being filmed; or, at least, voiceover and editing are used to construct a text in which the invisibility of the camera is upheld. Yet in *The Office*, this convention repeatedly falls apart, as the characters refuse to stay within the roles required of them by docusoap. Brent, who repeatedly states how he and his colleague Chris Finch should be on television – 'We're the new Morecambe and Wise'[45] – clearly performs not only to entertain his workers but also to impress the film crew and the audience at home. When making jokes in response to others he often glances at the camera as he delivers the punchline, checking he is being filmed and ensuring his performance will be captured as he intends. He tells the camera crew to leave their equipment running when Finch arrives, assuring them that they will be able to make a series out of them. Clearly this is a reference to the way in which the presence of the camera has an effect upon its subjects, and refers indirectly to the successful media careers of *The Cruise*'s (BBC1, 1997–98) Jane McDonald and *Driving School*'s (BBC1, 1997) Maureen Rees.[46] It is clear that Brent senses an opportunity to be noticed by a talent spotter.

It is here that the programme explicitly makes a distinction between the kinds of performance associated with sitcom, and those apparent in other television forms. Much of the humour in *The Office* arises from the embarrassment felt by other characters, and the viewing audience, at Brent's awful attempts at sexist, racist outdated humour. It is therefore significant that Brent performs as if he is in a sitcom, awaiting everyone's attention, adopting a stance similar to standup comedians, delivering preconceived lines and leaving a pause after jokes for laughter. He thus represents the performance style and

44 Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, pp. 92–3.

45 Eric Morecambe and Ernie Wise are probably the most famous comic double-act in British television history, appearing in many series (*The Morecambe and Wise Show*, ATV 1961–8, BBC 1968–77, ITV 1978–83) and Christmas specials. Their television work displayed its theatrical heritage in filming, performance style and humour content. Lewisohn, *Radio Times Guide to TV Comedy*, pp. 452–4.

46 Bruzzi, 'Docusoaps', p. 134.

humour content of traditional sitcom, signalling comic intent through traditional metacommunication which is singularly at odds with the diegetic world the series constructs. It would seem that by offering a laughable disparity between such conventional comedic performance and the 'realistic' office environment, presented via the docusoap format, traditional comedy is repositioned as merely ridiculous, to be laughed *at* and not *with*. In this way, *The Office* explicitly ridicules such a performance style and the comedy associated with it, redrawing it as outdated in relation to contemporary television forms and audience understandings of them.

On a broader scale, *The Office* also critiques the nature of television performance overall, particularly that type of performance most commonly associated with documentary, whose veracity rests on the assumption that there is a *lack* of performance. This can be seen in Brent's performance when he is alone in his office, apparently being interviewed by the unseen camera crew. While the shot is set up so that he is looking at the interviewer, who is positioned slightly off camera, Brent repeatedly glances directly at the camera at opportune moments, such as when he makes statements about his success as a boss or prowess as a comedian. He thus explicitly manipulates the conversation so that he can tell stories that make him appear significant, charitable and popular, and is clearly using the camera, and docusoap iself, to legitimize his actions and demonstrate his popularity. Significantly, while this reveals the uncaring demon Brent is, he obviously feels he is giving the camera crew what they want: interesting characters, funny moments and heartwarming stories. Brent recognizably understands the requirements of docusoap, and sees himself naturally able to fulfil them. In so doing, the programme uses for comedic purposes the inability of the documentary production crew to maintain authority over their text.

The problematic effect or presence of the docusoap camera is also demonstrated by the character Tim, who uses the camera in a very different way. It is apparent throughout the series that Tim is the unhappiest person in the office, and the narrative in the final episode of the first series revolves around his unfortunate decision to take a promotion rather than to resign and begin a psychology degree. Tim has previously demonstrated his detachment from his coworkers and their actions by using the camera as a means of escape. At moments when Brent and Gareth are at their most obnoxious, clearly performing for the camera crew, Tim is seen to steal quick, questioning glances at the camera, mocking his coworkers and clearly looking for a way out. In this way, Tim attempts to construct a relationship with both the camera crew and the audience at home, acknowledging the entertainment rationale behind the documentary process in a manner that undermines its supposed observational role. For Tim the camera functions as the possibility for escape, his pleading looks a cry to his unknown audience to rescue him.

What both Tim's and Brent's use of the camera most tellingly reveals is the effect of the camera crew on its subjects. Thus, while documentary and docusoap often rely on an assumption that they present an unmediated truth, much of the humour in *The Office* comes from demonstrating the impossibility of this. Indeed, if the camera crew had no effect on its subjects it would result in a very dull programme. What *The Office* does is to explore the lengths to which people are apparently willing to go to be on television, and in Tim's case his awareness of this falsity and his ability to use the conventions of documentary to his own ends.

This is not to say, however, that *The Office* adopts a documentary aesthetic so that it can more easily attain the kinds of legitimacy that may be associated with the form. While the programme does employ all the signifiers of authenticity – the handheld cameras, the downplayed acting, the mundane storylines[47] – the humour of the series is often based around the gap between the valued 'authenticity' of documentary and the minimal truths it can actually capture. By illustrating how docusoap 'characters' are capable of using the camera to their own ends, *The Office* articulates concerns around documentary fakery. And by using the conventions of documentary for humour, *The Office* undermines the distinctions between sitcom and documentary, between seriousness and humour, demonstrating that the outcomes of one can be achieved through the conventions of the other.

47 Dai Vaughan, *For Documentary: Twelve Essays* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1999), p. 120.

The Office's use of the documentary form characteristics continues the long-running debate about veracity. It is clear that there is a disparity between the supposed objectivity and depiction of truth required of documentary by both audiences and regulators, and the inability to achieve such a goal as evidenced by many filmmakers and academics. In that sense, it is incorrect to suggest *The Office* adopts the characteristics of all types of documentary; instead, its insistence on engaging with the tension between the camera as objective record and the effects of filming are resolved and explicitly used within cinema verite. John Corner, following Jean Rouch, divides documentary into direct cinema and cinema verite. While both forms privilege documentary as observation, direct cinema assumes that the camera is capable of objective record, and, significantly, relies on filmmakers recording merely what is happening rather than searching for, or instigating, exciting footage. Cinema verite, on the other hand,

> Far from wishing to render the camera 'invisible' and to project what happens before it as some magical capturing of the spontaneous ... [instead] ... showed the filmmaking process intervening in the events filmed, with participants not only looking at, but also addressing, the filmmakers.[48]

Clearly this has implications for the reality which any such film

48 John Corner, *The Art of Record: a Critical Introduction to Documentary* (New York, NY and Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 43–4.

purports to present and, in fact, the deliberate display of the characteristics of cinema verite results in texts which explicitly refuse to present the possibility of the lack of mediation. Also, cinema verite has implications for the performance of its subjects, in which the acknowledged relationship between the filmed and the filmmakers relies on the proximity of the latter for its very existence. As has been shown, the humour of *The Office* relies on these tensions for its effects.

Corner notes 'the way in which television has recently attempted to mix a primarily verité approach with elements drawn from other areas of programming', terming this development 'neo-verité'.[49] Clearly, what I am suggesting here is a development of what might be termed 'comedy verite', in which the visual characteristics of verite have been adopted by sitcom for comedic purposes. However, comedy verite is more than a definition of style. It also indicates a use of television comedy to interrogate the processes and representations of media forms, in a manner similar to the aggressively involved characteristics of cinema verite.

49 Ibid., p. 50.

Considering the history and techniques of television comedy, it is perhaps unsurprising that such a development should take place. There is a tradition of British broadcast humour questioning, exaggerating and undermining the characteristics of different genres and media institutions. Spike Milligan's work on *The Goons* (BBC Home Service, 1951–60) and the many *Q* series (BBC2, 1969–80) relied on experimenting with, and reacting against, the limitations of the medium on which they were broadcast. *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (BBC2, 1969–74) similarly played freely with the conventions of the sketch show, repeatedly failing to deliver standard punchlines and allowing discrete sketches to bleed into one another. Similarly *The Young Ones* (BBC2, 1982–84), while critiquing racist and sexist sitcom content, also played with the genre's structures, abandoning realism, breaking the fourth wall, and failing adequately to end narratives. In doing so, all of these series reacted against the dominant genres of their times, as well as questioning conventions for television comedy. It in unsurprising, then, following the sudden popularity and schedule dominance on British television of the documentary in the 1990s, that comedy should be used to interrogate and play with this particular form's structures.

The Office is only one of many new comedy verite sitcoms using the format of other genres to create different kinds of comedy. *Marion and Geoff*, for example, pares down its visuality to a point which is inconceivable for sitcom and sparse even for documentary. The series' only performer is Keith (Rob Brydon), a London-based taxi driver whose estranged wife, Marion, and two children live in Cardiff with Marion's new lover, Geoff. The series consists of Keith's monologues to the camera as he drives his taxi. The camera is positioned on his dashboard and never moves; all we see is Keith, framed by his workplace, as he stubbornly maintains his optimism in the face of a

collapsed marriage and an increasingly pointless life. For Keith, the camera functions as a confessional, in a manner similar to the series *Video Nation* (BBC, 1993–).[50] He addresses the camera directly, saying hello to it (and thus to us as an audience) and pouring out heartfelt confessions; for Keith, the camera is his only friend. Furthermore, it quickly becomes apparent that Keith's naivety means he is incapable of realizing the implications of what he is saying: his optimistic statements about his relationship with his children – whom he very rarely sees – suggest to the audience the lack of interest his offspring have in him, a disinterest he continually fails to realize. The series' humour lies in accessing the truth of documentary – in this instance the gap between the truth which Keith attempts to construct (and clearly believes) and that which is apparent to everyone else. Thus the comedy emerges as an effect of the different levels of narrative which the documentary form offers, where one contradicts the other.

Another response to the apparent veracity of documentary narrative can be seen in *People Like Us*. This is a series of fictional documentaries in which each episode centres on a different workplace such as an estate agent, a school, and so on. The only recurring character is the documentary filmmaker, Roy Mallard (Chris Langham), whom we hear speaking to his subjects but, as he is always behind the camera, never see. The humour in *People Like Us* arises primarily from Mallard's incompetence as a filmmaker, forever asking the wrong questions, annoying his subjects, and talking about himself; thus the resulting documentary never matches Mallard's intentions, as he constantly grapples to maintain some sort of control over his text and its contents. In doing so, the programme foregrounds the very constructed nature of documentary, for aspects of the production process continually infringe upon the legitimacy of the text. Unlike *The Office* and *Marion and Geoff*, then, *People Like Us* places the filmmaker as the comic focus rather than the subjects, finding humour in the 'performative'[51] subgenre of documentary and explicitly displaying the subjective processes of documentary-making arising out of the filmmaker(s) involved.

The series' humour also relies on the effect that the intrusion of a documentary crew can have upon individuals and social groups, as interviewees constantly reject Mallard's questions and alter their behaviour once they realize they are being filmed. Throughout, Mallard's performance remains downplayed, with a clear lack of comic metacommunication. Indeed, as we never see Mallard, and yet much of the humour arises from his droning nasal incompetence, his existence as a comic character negates the traditional requirement for comic excess. However, Mallard's very intrusiveness, and his subjects' subsequent refusal to answer personal questions, displays the efforts of filmmakers to construct interesting television, and the effects of camera crews on participants. *People Like Us*'s humour, then, comes from an

50 *Video Nation* is a series in which 'The BBC lent camcorders to and trained participants who were then free to offer insights into the minutiae of their lives, normally by a piece to camera', Winston, *Lies, Damn Lies and Documentaries*, p. 143.

51 Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, pp. 153–80.

explicit presentation of the production processes of documentary, where we are invited to find laughable the gap between the form and content that are conventionally associated with documentary, and the incompetence of this particular filmmaker.

Comically engaging more actively with the structures of other television genres are Chris Morris's series *The Day Today* and *Brass Eye*. The former is a parody of news programmes; the latter a parody of current affairs programmes. Both series visually structure themselves as closely as possible to their target, the comedy arising from the accuracy of the lampooning, particularly in the self-centred self-importance of news journalists, and the excessive use of meaningless graphics in much contemporary factual television. The most famous moments in *Brass Eye* concern Chris Morris successfully tricking real celebrities into doing pieces to camera about campaigns which are, unknown to them, fictional. These include a crusade to rescue an elephant whose cage is so small her trunk is stuck up her own anus, and, notoriously, the fictional drug 'cake' supposedly flooding Britain from Prague, which Morris hoodwinked one MP into raising as a concern in the British parliament.

Here the comedy relies at least partly on the accuracy of the parody, as well as a whole range of linguistic absurdities that could appear in a number of comedy forms. Yet a prime concern is clearly the gap between the presentation of informational television – whether that is news, current affairs or documentary – and its content. By showing a range of public figures who are willing to support campaigns which have no validity, the production processes of factual programming are foregrounded and, in this instance, rendered laughable. Morris's work, then, perhaps most obviously demonstrates the active, questioning nature of comedy verite, in which conventional television techniques intended to disguise processes of mediation are laid bare for comic purposes. In doing so the sitcom, which has traditionally displayed its artificiality, has instead used comedy to display the artificiality of other genres of programming whose meaning and veracity is at least partly bound up in their pretence of a lack of mediation.

Such developments in the sitcom raise significant questions about the ways in which the genre has traditionally been analyzed and understood. This is particularly true for statements made about the ways in which audiences make sense of sitcom, and how comedy signals its humorous intent. It is difficult to see here that the pleasure offered by such programmes is 'manifestly one of the satisfaction of watching sitcom', as outlined above. Quite the opposite: by using the characteristics of other genres, and removing those traditionally associated with sitcom, the pleasure offered requires at least a working knowledge of other television forms.

It has been shown that a number of new series on British television

have abandoned some aspects of the traditional sitcom form, and instead now reproduce the characteristics of other genres. The question remains as to why this should be so, and what implications it has for audiences and comedy more generally. Significantly, this development marks comedy's reengagement with an active social role (albeit in relation to the *media* social role) which sitcom has traditionally been criticized for abandoning. There are signs, then, that sitcom has moved away from being 'mere entertainment', and has in some instances abandoned the genre characteristics which distinguish it so forcefully from other forms. In doing so, the sitcom has finally abandoned its music hall origins, and begun to interact with aspects of television to create meaning. This is, then, sitcom *as* television, and, as such, is television comedy made by, and for, generations of viewers for whom the music hall experience is meaningless. That is, while Medhurst and Tuck suggest that sitcom recreated the collective experience of theatre audiencehood, this is only appropriate for audiences for whom music hall signifiers have any meaning, and for whom, importantly, music hall functioned as a significant social event. As television has replaced 'live' entertainment as the social arena in which societies and cultures talk to and about themselves, so it has became necessary for sitcom, to maintain its social role, to adopt the characteristics of that social medium. In so doing, the sitcom has not only ceased resembling its previous self, it has also begun to interrogate and break down the very characteristics of the medium whose forms it is finally beginning to embrace. Comedy verite, then, is comedy for audiences raised on television formats.

In addition, comedy verite represents a further development within the debate about the nature of documentary as a whole, one which, while having a long history, was certainly reinvigorated by the docusoap boom on British television in the 1990s. The movement of documentary forms into mainstream primetime broadcasting, followed by its hybridization with other genres and mutation into 'reality TV', has meant that 'documentary and factual television now exist in a space that is neither wholly fictional nor wholly factual, both yet neither'.[52] Because of this, the social role of previously factual forms is one repeatedly interrogated by policymakers, programme producers and audiences. It should come as no surprise then that sitcom, a form which has continually used current concerns for its comedic content, should exploit the newfound contradictions within factual programming for its own comedic ends. Comedy verite not only represents the logical conclusion to contemporary developments in television forms, whether factual or fictional; it also suggests that the sitcom, a form forever maligned for its stability, offers a site for subtle, yet powerful, critiques of television media.

52 Jon Dovey, *Freakshow: First Person Media and Factual Television* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p. 11.

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Patrice Petro, *Aftershocks of the New: Feminism and Film History*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002, 215 pp.

LAUREN RABINOVITZ

Aftershocks of the New collects essays of the author's written from the late 1980s until the late 1990s. In the introduction, Petro identifies what creates coherence across her wide range of topics and historical contexts – each is a polemical intervention into film studies and its presumptions, suppositions and canons of knowledge. In this way, Petro's criticism, historicization of intellectual positions and trends, and unmasking of the underlying politics of knowledge represents what is most essential about feminist film criticism and history – a constant challenge to the orthodoxies and power inequities of epistemology.

'The aftershocks of the new' to which the title refers actually link two separate periods of time and their theorization. For Petro, the first identifies the status of feminist film theory in the academy in the 1990s when the newness of both film studies' academic legitimacy and feminist film theory had worn off. In a milieu shaped by understanding contemporary culture as postmodern and by second-wave feminism's 'lapse' into postfeminism, Petro addresses the aftershocks from, or reactions to, the legacy of 1970s and 1980s feminist film theories. Secondly, the title also refers to the 1920s in Weimar Germany (Petro's field of research specialization)[1] when the Frankfurt School wrote about cultural reactions once the shocks of Modernism had been diffused. In her effort to reassess and champion Siegfried Kracauer's theories of mass culture, Petro (at her most original) speculates about 'boredom' as a way of characterizing Weimar culture, its response to Modernism, and the categories of 'shock' and 'distraction' already so well rehearsed in today's discussions of Frankfurt School ideas. Petro's focus throughout, then, is not centred on specific objects of study or even particular methods and approaches to these subjects, but about

1 See Patrice Petro, *Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

creating an intellectual history for feminist inquiry in the present and future.

Several essays represent Petro's reactions to plenary sessions at the Society for Cinema Studies, to books or journal special issues. These address a number of trends that characterize the academic study of film in the 1990s (p. 1). Petro analyzes arguments grounded in a high–low art dichotomy for excluding television studies within institutionalized film studies in the USA, and criticizes the way these perpetuate aesthetic ideologies that initiated film studies' academic legitimacy in the first place (p. 2). She chides dismissals of feminist film theory that claim its legacy is an ahistorical, dead-end orthodoxy of psychoanalysis by arguing for the critique of authorship, the stakes of political subversion, and the historical projects underlying scholarship in the 1970s and 1980s, relying, in particular, on Laura Mulvey's landmark 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema' and Mary Ann Doane's *The Desire to Desire* (p. 3).[2] She strikes out against Francophiliac domination of film theory since the 1970s by celebrating the German Frankfurt School, particularly Kracauer as a little-understood cultural theorist of the everyday (p. 4). She reacts to nostalgia for film feminism of the 1970s that she sees in recent statements by senior film scholars (Teresa DeLauretis, Linda Williams, Mary Ann Doane) and in B. Ruby Rich's autobiographical book historicizing film feminism, *Chick Flicks*.[3] In each of these essays, Petro rereads well-known essays and theorists in film studies – often taking no prisoners – in order to reevaluate what has mattered intellectually to film academics, and what she believes *should* matter. Her generally well-aimed critiques do occasionally seem to stem from dissatisfaction that her work is not more frequently cited or from having a personal axe to grind; her criticism of Dudley Andrew and Tom Gunning, in particular, implies some personal feeling of resentment, especially since Andrew was her dissertation advisor and mentor.

Andrew's well-known work on André Bazin[4] is not single-handedly (or even jointly) responsible for the dominance of French film theory over the last thirty years, which Petro characterizes as 'the relative ease with which ideas have circulated between French and Anglo-American traditions, and the fundamentally impaired or more limited movement of German theorists in the United States and Britain – at least insofar as the recent history of film theory is concerned' (p. 47). Nevertheless Petro claims Andrew accomplished this by pitting Bazin against Kracauer and thereby setting the terms for future discussion. While one has to second her acknowledgment of the role of translation problems (also a problem for certain French texts), her theory of Francophilia and Germanophobia in film theory is overstated, especially since Benjamin scholarship alone has spawned a small cottage industry. Even at the time of the essay's originally publication (1991), Adorno, Benjamin, Brecht, Simmler and others (including Kracauer!) were widely read in English in film studies. In addition, the feminist film

2 Laura Mulvey, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1975), pp. 6–18; Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: the Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987).

3 B. Ruby Rich, *Chick Flicks: Theories and Memories of the Feminist Film Movement* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

4 Petro especially singles out: Dudley Andrew, *The Major Film Theories: an Introduction* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1976); Dudley Andrew, 'The neglected tradition of phenomenology in film theory', in Bill Nichols (ed.), *Movies and Methods* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985).

theorists associated with *Frauen und Film* (for example, Gertrud Koch and Heide Schlüpmann) have had an Anglo-US audience for their interpretations of these theorists as well as for their own work.[5] In the USA, German-trained Miriam Hansen actively published on German theories that formed the basis for her own work on silent cinema and female spectatorship.[6] Petro's aim may be to resuscitate Kracauer's early scholarship (such as his 1927 'The mass ornament' essay) for its general applicability to the culturally embedded experience of film spectatorship, but she frames her rescue in a polemic that seems difficult to sustain.

Petro's essays that stake out an intellectual history of feminist film scholarship are more successful. If her underlying purpose is to lay claim to two important traditions for the future of film studies – the Frankfurt School and feminist film theories of the 1970s and 1980s – she more fully pieces together an intellectual history of feminist influence in film studies than she does of the Frankfurt School's. Her last essay, 'Film feminism and nostalgia', reminds the reader that the feminist purpose in the 1970s was initially to establish a legitimate position from which to speak at all, and about creating a radical new cinema (p. 166) – about praxis connected to intellectual critique. Quoting extensively from Janet Bergstrom's 1990 essay 'American feminism and French film theory', she agrees with Bergstrom's concern for the loss of an extensive debate with film theory and its historical context more generally (p. 168) and finds it more pertinent to the current situation than the purely nostalgic recollections of past communities, activism and urgency that she hears uttered elsewhere.[7] Unfortunately, here too, Petro takes the opportunity to criticize influential film scholar Gunning for ignoring gendered questions in his historically informed film theories about early cinema (pp. 171–2) and, in doing so, she relinquishes the chance to lay claim to any grand visions for the future of feminist film history.

The germ of Petro's own theory about film as a cultural manifestation of modernism and postmodernism may best be found in those essays that tackle specific historical case studies of cinema and popular culture (for example, 'After shock, between boredom and history', 'World weariness, Weimar women, and visual culture', 'The Hottentot and the blonde Venus'). These essays are the most satisfying as well as the most maddening in the volume – maddening for the brevity of their original claims as well as for their incomplete analyses of films – and tentatively lay out Petro's ideas about boredom as a productive aesthetic and political category germinated in Weimar Germany. Boredom, rather than the more passive state of distraction, preserves a kind of purposeful human agency: it is, after all, as Petro says, 'a calculated state of indifference' (p. 69) that, according to both Benjamin and Kracauer, may be engaged as a politics of resistance. In an argument that also alerts the reader to important debate on this subject by Maurice Blanchot, Georg Simmel and Bertolt Brecht,

5 In fairness to Petro, she does rely upon their observations in both her discussion of Kracauer and in her scholarship on Weimar culture. However, that very fact would seem to mitigate her claims about a French stranglehold on film theory.

6 As with Koch and Schlüpmann, Petro references Hansen's scholarship on German theories of culture. She does not mention Hansen's major work, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Cinema* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

7 Janet Bergstrom, 'American feminism and French film theory', *Iris*, vol. 10 (April 1990), pp. 183–97.

Petro's essays intertwine these ideas with a range of art objects which take up boredom as an aesthetic – Brassai's photographs of Paris in the 1930s contrasted to remakes featuring Madonna in the 1990s, *Blonde Venus* (1932) as a German-made film in Hollywood, Hannah Hoch's representations of Weimar women. Although these are all single case studies, collectively they give the impression of a book waiting to cohere, and we can only hope that Petro will deepen and advance her ideas into a full-blown argument on the subject of Weimar culture, the aesthetics of boredom and feminist film history.

In the meantime, she comes closest to a pronouncement of her position on feminist film history at the end of the essay, 'Historical ennui, feminist boredom'. Although this chapter is placed in the middle of her book, it is one of the last written and among the most recent in the author's thinking. It fruitfully defines boredom in relationship to feminists' questions about their own exhaustion in the 1990s and to modernist literary writers in the 1920s. It ends with a manifesto for the new millennium:

> In any event (and perhaps especially in this time without event for feminism), a feminist historiography that takes its inspiration from modernism must reject the tedium of conventional representation (including what has now become a conventional representation of feminism itself) in order to reclaim the banality – in the sense of the everydayness – of gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation. At the same time, however, it must refuse postmodern melancholy and its discourse of lack and loss, of 'history at an end,' if it is to represent a women's (past) losses and imagine their (future) gains. To put it slightly differently, in this time of historical ennui, even (perhaps especially) within feminism, there remains an ever-present need to struggle against the everyday on behalf of the everyday. And this will involve, as it has always done, a struggle not simply against boredom, but also for it. (pp. 93–4)

In passages such as this, Petro is an eloquent provocateur – asking questions, raising challenges, standing up for film feminism's future as an intellectual fusion of theory and history in support of purposeful political action.

Sabine Hake, *Popular Cinema of the Third Reich*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2001, 272 pp.

JULIAN PETLEY

Popular Cinema of the Third Reich is a series of case studies of various aspects of Third Reich cinema, of which one, a study of Detlef Sierck and *Schlussakkord* (1936), was published in an earlier version in *Screen*.[1] The case study approach was deliberately chosen to articulate the author's 'resistance to totalizing models on both the conceptual and analytical levels' (p. xiii). Chapters include a study of set design, which investigates one of modernism's legacies to Third Reich cinema, an examination of the role of Hollywood films in the German market and of German films in the USA, an analysis of the representation of working women in wartime cinema, and a case study of the actor Heinz Rühmann. All of these contain a great deal of new and fascinating material, but I want to concentrate here on Hake's approach to the study of Third Reich cinema as a whole, which is the subject of her preface and of her first chapter – 'Popular cinema, national cinema, Nazi cinema: a definition of terms' – although her extremely interesting and revealing chapters on audience research and film theory in Nazi Germany also contain some useful material in this respect.

In the light of recent interest in everyday life and popular culture in Nazi Germany it is unsurprising, as Hake points out, that:

> German film scholars have turned to the cinema of the Third Reich and begun to explore previously neglected areas and uncharted territories in what is still regarded by many as a highly problematic period of film history. Most initiatives have been informed by the desire to move beyond deterministic theories of propaganda and ideology and incorporate more film-specific methods and enquiries. (p. vii)

1 Sabine Hake, 'The melodramatic imagination of Detlef Sierck: *Final Chord* (1936) and its resonances', *Screen*, vol. 38, no. 2 (1997), pp. 129–48.

In Hake's view, however, much remains to be done. In particular:

> what still deserves to be examined in greater detail are the heterogeneous elements, including the social fantasies, cultural traditions, economic interests and institutional pressures, that thrive even under the conditions of state ownership and control. It is in response to these larger debates that my study on popular cinema in the Third Reich calls for the normalization of German film history. (pp. vii-viii)

By 'normalization' she means:

> the recognition of the continuities on the aesthetic, cultural, social and economic levels that haunt the history of German film beyond all ideological divisions and political ruptures; it also means an acute awareness of the paradoxical, asymmetrical, and nonsynchronous relationship between cinema and politics both then and now. (p. viii)

At the same time, however, she states that: 'it is my belief that only this process of historical revision will bring into relief the particular characteristics – the Otherness – of German cinema after 1933, and do so precisely through the practices shared with other national cinemas of the period' (p. xiv).

Three basic assumptions underpin the book:

> First, cinema in the Third Reich was above all a popular cinema, sustained by well-established generic conventions, cultural traditions, aesthetic sensibilities, social practices, and a highly developed star system. Second, these popular forms and styles developed through selective incorporation of elements from the pre-1933 period into post-1933 cultural practices and the ongoing transformation of these elements in the productive encounter with other national cinemas, especially the dominant Hollywood model. Third, the discourses of the popular and the political remained at odds with each other and, based on their different investment in the national and international, and the modern and the traditional, entered into highly unstable and invariably provisional alliances. (pp. viii-ix)

Thus, she argues, Third Reich cinema 'must be evaluated in the larger context of German cinema, including its history and historiography' (p. ix), because

> only a context-based definition of popular cinema is able to reconstruct the processes of appropriation, incorporation, and transformation that connected filmic practices after 1933 to the Weimar period and to classical Hollywood cinema and that facilitated the many overlaps with musical, literary, and theatrical culture. (p. xi)

Within this context, she argues, there were three factors which made German cinema

such an important medium, both of conflict and compromise, in the articulation of modern lifestyles and contemporary sensibilities after 1933.... The complicated relationship to the project of mass culture and modernity, including the progressive legacies from the Weimar years; the heavy reliance on the conventions of classical narrative cinema both in its Germanized and Americanized versions; and the inherent tension between a market-driven economy and a dictatorial political regime. (p. 9)

Thus, although National Socialist ideology may have appeared to be extremely hostile to certain aspects of modernism (as generally understood, at least), the cinema, along with other popular cultural forms, continued to develop its relationship with modern consumer culture. As Hake notes, this paradox has been described by Karsten Witte as 'the removal of modernity from public life and its simultaneous reintroduction by means of film and other mass media' (p. 10). This retreat of modernity to the private sphere, with the public sphere reserved for the cult of the more backward-looking 'national community', contributed to the kind of 'split consciousness' described elsewhere by Hans Dieter Schäfer .[2] In this vision of things, as Detlef Peukert has suggested,[3] popular cinema was one of various forces and practices that sustained everyday life precisely through toleration of inconsistencies and compromises, including those between the reality of an Americanized urban culture and the fantasy of a Germanic folk culture.

Hake's study shifts the debate from the study of individual films to the examination of popular cinema, defined as: 'a dynamic process that involves aesthetic styles and social practices, cultural traditions and economic products, public institutions and private imaginations, and, last but not least, various notions of "the popular"' (p. ix). Her aim is

> to develop further the contextual models that show popular cinema as a historically specific articulation of social fantasies and mentalities and examine its relevance as an ongoing negotiation of conflicting positions and influences. Key to this conceptual realignment is the insistence on cinema as a material practice and historical force, [one which performs] multiple functions as a local and national industry, a cultural institution, a public sphere, a social experience, and, of course, a fantasy machine. (p. ix)

This approach 'shifts the terms of the debate from a deterministic relationship between cinema and ideology to the often inconsistent articulation of that relationship in economic strategies, political measures, artistic traditions, social movements, and, perhaps most importantly, popular tastes and mentalities' (p. x).

According to Hake, popular cinema specifically in the Third Reich must be approached through its inherent contradictions. Chief amongst

2 Hans Dieter Schäfer, *Das gespaltene Bewusstsein. Deutsche Kultur und Lebenswirklichkeit 1933–1945* (Munich: Hanser, 1981).

3 Detlef Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition and Racism in Everyday Life* (New Haven, NJ: Yale University Press, 1987).

these is the 1933 *Gleichschaltung* (coordination) of a film industry whose stars and genres both exhibited distinct continuities with Weimar and parallels with Hollywood. As she puts it:

> on the one hand, the emphasis on fantasy and illusion made popular cinema a privileged site for the imaginary resolution of social and psychological conflicts and therefore instrumental to the preservation of the status quo. On the other, the cinematic experience in the widest sense gave rise to other meanings and effects that, while not subversive as such, often threatened the overall system of prohibitions, restrictions, and controlled transgressions. (p. xi)

Clearly, then, Hake's study joins the growing ranks of books and articles which attempt to move the debate about Third Reich cinema beyond the traditional propaganda model and its conceptual binaries. Foremost amongst these, as Hake acknowledges, have been those which have utilized what she calls an 'extended notion of ideology' (p. 7), and she cites in particular Stephen Lowry's work[4] as showing how Nazi ideology in cinema can be approached 'not through particular contents, but through the mobilization of emotions and desires and their imaginary reconciliation in accordance with the changing demands of culture and society', quoting his conclusion that 'we need to shift our perspective from a narrowly political definition of ideology which asks what "message" films might have had, and instead scrutinize how films actually negotiated cultural and ideological conflicts'. Thus Lowry demonstrates that the question about the specifically fascist nature of these films can be answered only through historical contextualization, including the close connections between new popular cultural forms and established cultural practices within the fascist public sphere.

Hake also cites Linda Schulte-Sasse's recent, more psychoanalytically-inclined articulation of the 'ideology critique',[5] and in particular her suggestion that: 'rather than taking ideology as the starting point and looking at how movies show ideology, we can perhaps take movies as the starting point and examine how they harbor, transform, exceed and undermine political ideology'.[6] Indeed, Hake herself has recourse to the notion of films as 'social fantasies' in which illusions 'assumed their most important sociopsychological function not as an escape from, but as a corrective and an alternative to, existing reality' (p. 17). As this concept of fantasy suggests an active relationship between the producers and consumers of filmic images, it also

> underscores the pervasiveness of compromise in a political system usually characterized as a hierarchical power structure or totalizing ideological system. From such a perspective of ongoing struggle, the fantasies produced by, for, in, and through popular cinema must be

4 Stephen Lowry, *Pathos und Politik: Ideologie in Spielfilmen des Nationalsozialismus* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1991). See also his 'Ideology and excess in Nazi melodrama: *The Golden City*', *New German Critique*, no. 74 (Spring/Summer, 1998).

5 Linda Schulte-Sasse, *Entertaining the Third Reich: Illusions of Wholeness in Nazi Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996). This was reviewed in *Screen*, vol. 38, no. 3 (1997), pp. 287–95.

6 Ibid., p. xiii.

> regarded as an integral part of social reality, and as such, they are crucial to any analysis of popular culture and everyday life in the Third Reich. (p. 17)

However, according to Hake, these and other approaches

> remain incomplete as long as they fail to achieve the conceptual shift from Ideology to ideologies. Above all this requires greater attention to the complicated relationship of popular cinema to high and low culture, as well as to regional, national and international culture in the context of institutional practices, aesthetic forms and cultural traditions. (p. 7)

This brings us on to the all-important, and, I would argue, somewhat problematic, discussion of the popular in Third Reich cinema. Hake suggests that one might think of the popular in this context as 'the expression of a highly unstable compromise between the decline of a traditional folk culture and bourgeois high culture and the simultaneous rise of a streamlined consumer culture and a highly politicized media culture' (p. 15). She also points out that there are two different, and indeed conflicting, senses of the popular in German: the *volkstümlich* (belonging to 'authentic' folk culture) and the 'popular' (mass produced and consumed culture). She goes on to argue that:

> the new alliances between state and industry established a centralized power structure that, under the motto of 'Volkstümlichkeit' [which Hake translates as folksiness, although I prefer folkishness], cultivated two very different models of cinema: a small, but highly subsidized, national cinema committed to the idea of race and nation, and a large, market-driven popular cinema designed to satisfy bourgeois and petty-bourgeois tastes. (p. 19)

She describes this 'schism within the popular' as a

> new division between classical genre cinema, whose formal conventions and social rituals had finally been validated as the expression of a streamlined consumer culture, and the kind of self-consciously German art film that realized its cultural ambitions through a heavy reliance on the classical canon of German music and literature in the form of literary adaptations and musical biographies'. (p. 19)

Hake also refers to 'the strategic division between a self-consciously national cinema with political ambitions and a popular cinema committed to private pleasures and fantasies' (p. 21). In her view, the former tendency was most clearly represented by the *Staatsauftragsfilm* (state-commissioned film), which she calls 'a genre defined through its highly politicized conditions of production and reception' (p. 177); this then allowed for 'the integration of international styles into national traditions represented by more conventional genres' (p. 19). Hake concludes that this division represented 'the institutionalisation, in the

very terms of cinema as an illusory public sphere, of the widening abyss between individual and social fantasies' (p. 19).

Thus, according to Hake:

> in everyday life, the popular remained the primary site of struggle for the rearticulation of the national in its changing social, cultural and political manifestations. Identified with the continuities of mass culture, including its strong consumerist orientation, popular cinema continued to play its most important institutional and ideological functions by sustaining the illusion of a public sphere free from politics and a form of popular entertainment concerned only with individual desires and fantasies.... Yet popular cinema also provided a social and cultural context in which audiences could partake in the ongoing transformation of mass culture and modernity, including in an international context, and engage with the social fantasies that addressed persistent social anxieties over questions of identity in the registers of classical narrative cinema. (p. 22)

In general terms, Hake concludes that: 'what is needed ... is a theory of popular cinema that neither dismisses the filmic imagination as a mere reflection of social reality nor denounces its wish formations as deceptive and false' (p. 18). Indeed, but would anybody today who was reasonably well versed in film theory seriously disagree? And getting exercised about the now elderly and infirm 'propaganda model' of Third Reich cinema (pp. 1–6) is surely a bit like tilting at windmills?

The author's own preferred model for studying Third Reich cinema locates its specificity 'not in some stable ideological system or institutional structure but in actual filmic practices' (p. 9). However, I have to say that it is not immediately obvious to me why filmic practices should be divorced from the ideological system (whether stable or unstable) and the institutional structure in which they operate – in any society, but especially in one as 'coordinated' as the Third Reich, even if the degree of coordination was indeed not as watertight and absolute as it architects would have preferred and as their rhetoric would lead one to believe. My own view is that it is largely this isolation of filmic practices from other factors which leads Hake into what I regard as the most problematic aspect of her book, namely her distinction between the two different models of cinema. For me, the real difficulty here is that the films of what she calls the 'national cinema' were produced by exactly the same industry which produced the 'market-driven' films. Admittedly the former were given a degree of special treatment, but this really consisted only of bigger budgets, longer schedules and more elaborate publicity. In other words they were the blockbusters of their day, their main difference from more run-of-the-mill productions being their size and status. But, most seriously for Hake's argument, they employed many of the same stars and, more importantly, the same popular genre frameworks as their poorer relations – in particular, these films were not in themselves a

genre, as Hake suggests, but belonged for the most part to the already firmly established genres of costume drama and/or biopic, with all their Hollywood (as well as Weimar) associations. Nor was this the only sense in which they were 'popular', as they attracted large audiences as well.

Thus what Hake appears to have done here in her particular conceptualization of the popular, is to reintroduce by other means, albeit theoretically sophisticated ones, the old distinction between 'political' and 'non-political' films which 'ideology critique' has done its best to displace. No one, I think, would now want to suggest that Third Reich films can or should be simply reduced to, or read as, ideology; on the other hand, I doubt if I am alone in wondering about the wisdom in this context of making 'the conceptual shift from Ideology to ideologies' (p. 19). Would it not be more helpful, instead, to try to conceptualize National Socialist ideology as both containing all sorts of unstable, heterogeneous and contradictory elements, and as having much in common, albeit in a particularly extreme and exacerbated fashion, with other, more familiar forms of populist ideology? Furthermore I would suggest that not only do we need to understand Third Reich cinema through National Socialist ideology but that the reverse is equally true as well. And finally, we also need to bear in mind Witte's admonition that: 'instead of determining which features constitute a fascist film, we need to examine how films functioned under fascism or rather, in the context of fascism'.[7] This is a task which is now firmly on the agenda, along with sustained methodological debate about how best to accomplish this task.

7 Karsten Witte, 'The indivisible legacy of Nazi cinema', *New German Critique*, no. 74 (Spring/Summer, 1998), p. 23.

Emma Wilson, *Cinema's Missing Children*. London: Wallflower Press, 2003, 181 pp.

ELIZABETH EDGINTON

Cinema's Missing Children offers a fascinating if disturbing account of the treatment of the lost child topos in recent independent and art-house film, raising questions about the limits of representation, the processes of mourning and contemporary anxieties about the cultural status of childhood. The category 'missing children' comprises those who have died, been murdered and/or been sexually abused, with individual chapters covering a wide range of films, including Krzysztof Kieślowski's *Three Colours: Blue* (1993), the work of Atom Egoyan (especially *Exotica* [1994]), Todd Solondz's *Happiness* (1998), Agnieszka Holland's *Olivier, Olivier* (1992), Pedro Almodóvar's *All About My Mother* (1999), Jane Campion's *The Portrait of a Lady* (1996), Michael Winterbottom's *Jude* (1995), Lynne Ramsay's *Ratcatcher* (1999), the Dogme films and Nanni Moretti's *The Son's Room* (2001). Like the films it considers, the book does not try to offer 'easy solutions or redemptive closure' (p. 4). Nevertheless, Wilson draws on an eclectic range of theories of mourning to illuminate detailed and sensitive analyses, the order of which suggests a tentative – if appropriately problematized – attempt at 'moving on'.

The Introduction and first three chapters are the most successful, offering convincing accounts which are both theoretically and emotionally engaged. The Introduction offers a summary of readings by Jacques Lacan, Slavoj Žižek and Cathy Caruth of Freud's interpretation of the 'burning child' dream,[1] not least because the disavowal of mourning rituals is one 'which cinema as medium at once of photographic realism and reparative, commemorative, knowing illusion, seems particularly apt to represent' (p. 8).

In Chapter One, Wilson analyzes the use in Kieślowski's *Three*

1 Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1994); Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989); Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, MD and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams, the Penguin Freud Library*, Volume IV (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985).

Colours: Blue of music, image, space and colour to represent Julie's mourning for her daughter, Anna, drawing on Julia Kristeva's linkage of the colour blue 'to the semiotic and to the space of symbiosis between mother and child' (p. 21) to suggest that, unlike Julie's mourning for her husband, her mourning for Anna opens out the meanings of the end of the film, thereby refusing 'curative norms' and indicating that the loss of a child 'is precisely unspeakable' (p. 26).[2]

In Chapter Two, Wilson explores both her own and Egoyan's fascination with Arsinée Khanjian, in order to consider the ways in which family dynamics work as part of the emotional interchange between film and spectator and, in Egoyan's case, between film, filmmaker and public. Wilson analyzes the parallel 'faulty' mourning in *Exotica* of Francis for his murdered daughter and Zoe (Khanjian) for her dead mother: Khanjian, she argues, mediates 'between the viewing in the film and the viewing of the film', that the film enters 'familiar debates about gender and spectatorship' (p. 36), but also mobilizes 'memories, fantasies and imaginary projections' which may be 'less politically correct, more troubled or subjective' (p. 40).

In her analysis of *Happiness*, Wilson suggests that Solondz interrogates the belief that 'child sexuality and sexual abuse structure contemporary American culture' (p. 45), showing the child Johnny as his rapist's 'object of desire' whilst avoiding the child who plays him becoming an object of desire for the viewer (p. 47). The film's refusal to represent sexual contact directly also assists in its 'caution over spectacularisation', as well as demonstrating 'the way the sexual damage of children exists as an image outside representation' (p. 48).

Chapters Four to Seven strike me as being slightly less compelling. In the chapter on *Olivier, Olivier*, Wilson's analyses of the mother–child dyad and sibling rivalry work relatively well, as does her brief interpretation of the swing image at the end of the film as 'the double movement of disavowal' (p. 63), but the rich analysis and emotional tension of the preceding chapters is absent. Chapter Five on *All About My Mother* is at least partially successful in its stated aim of analyzing how 'issues of emotion, trauma and passion intersect and interact with the sophistication, self-consciousness and radical sexual politics of Almodóvar's cinematic practice' (p. 65), and Wilson makes good use of Marina Warner, Kristeva and Diane Fuss,[3] but her interpretation is again relatively detached. In Chapter Six, on *The Portrait of a Lady*, she makes some insightful comments on the privileging of touch in the representation of mourning, but seems less focused, while in Chapter Seven, on *Jude*, her analysis of the film's interrogation of the heritage genre within what she terms 'a mortuary aesthetic' (p. 97) is again interesting, but less passionate than her earlier interpretations.

The final chapters of the book return to the engagement and focus found in its opening. In her analysis of *Ratcatcher*, Wilson draws on Caruth's work on 'the drive to life' to discuss the extent to which James is capable of surviving Ryan's death, and on her work on 'the

2 Julia Kristeva, 'Giotto's joy', *Desire in Language: a Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980).

3 Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: the Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Quartet, 1978); Julia Kristeva, 'Stabat mater', *Histoires d'amour* (Paris: Denoël, 1983); Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1995).

temporality and disruption of trauma' to comment on the film's visual stillness (pp. 112, 115).[4] Using Žižek,[5] in Chapter Nine she analyzes the questioning of paternal authority and the 'interrogation of film (and television) as testimony' in Dogme films (p. 123), and finally, in her analysis of *The Son's Room*, Wilson considers 'the possibility of moving on from such excessive grief', in order 'to offer a hopeful, if hesitant, point of closure' to her study (p. 139), commenting on the role of the analyst, the practical, social rituals of death and bereavement, and the rehearsals and rituals of grieving.

In her conclusion, Wilson draws on the work of Judith Butler and Henry Jenkins to conclude that the films she analyzes dissipate 'the reactionary fantasy of the normative family', by refusing to concede a causative connection between threats to children and changes to the structure of the contemporary family (p. 154).[6] The persistence of the theme of the missing child she attributes, rather, 'to the productive enmeshing of the concerns of contemporary films' and to the concerns of art cinema 'to push cinematic representations to new limits in thinking and showing extremes of fear and desire' (p. 157). It is this, rather than the subject of the lost child *per se*, she suggests, that marks the films as contemporary.

If there are weaknesses to the book, they lie in this somewhat disappointing conclusion and in the fact that Wilson (perhaps understandably) refuses the opportunity to explore further her relationship to her topic. She hints at her own emotional biography on several occasions, and is relatively open about her fascination with Khanjian in the chapter on *Exotica*, possibly deliberately eliding Khanjian with the character she plays on two occasions (pp. 32, 39). Yet her comment that in *Exotica*, 'Egoyan explores a narrative of the loss of childhood, of the loss of the child who wants to be heard' (pp. 38–9),[7] leaves one wondering if the little girl in question is not also Wilson herself, especially as she ends the chapter with the comment that Egoyan 'leaves me with the sense that I have to ask myself what brought me to this point. What have I seen that has channelled me here? Is it something hidden I still have to find?' (p. 40). In writing about her topic, Wilson is all too aware of issues of experiential authenticity and the potential for exploitation (p. 45), but it is her shift from an occasional, highly personal register to a much more detached one that sits slightly oddly. Biographical revelation about, and direct experience of, one's topic are not, of course, compulsory, especially given the difficult subject matter, and nor is traumatic experience in any case always entirely representable. Choosing only to hint at her own experience may well be Wilson's point, but a fuller treatment of such material would have worked well, as would developing it more directly in the conclusion. Nevertheless, *Cinema's Missing Children* is, for the most part, a thoroughly compelling book, and well worth the read.

4 Cathy Caruth, 'Parting words: trauma, silence and survival', in *Cultural Values*, vol. 5, no. 1, Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey (eds), special issue on 'Testimonial Cultures', (2001), pp. 7–27; Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*.

5 Slavoj Žižek, *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: on David Lynch's* Lost Highway (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2000).

6 Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2002); Henry Jenkins (ed.), *The Children's Culture Reader* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1998).

7 Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (New York, NY and London: Verso, 1995).